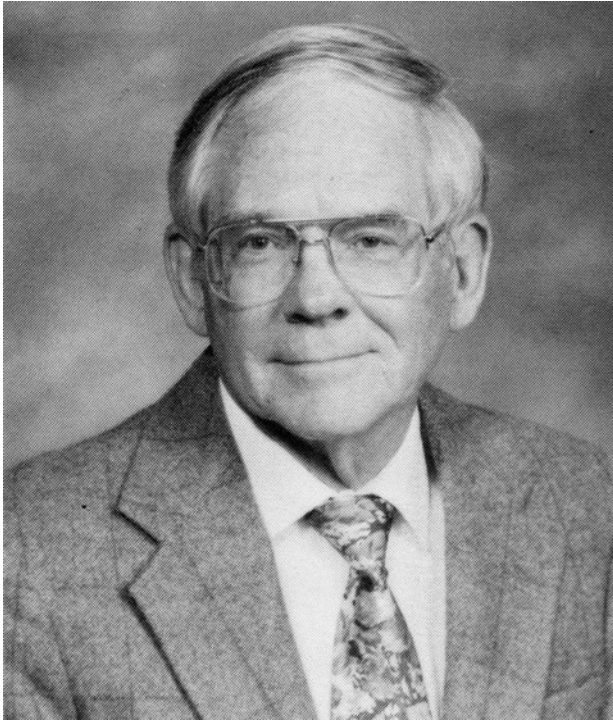


A Better Story

Dr. John Warner Jr.

**Opinion Columnist
for the Charleston Gazette
Charleston West Virginia**



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Between 1980 and 2009, John Warner wrote over 200 opinion columns that appeared in the Charleston Gazette newspaper in Charleston, West Virginia. John reflected (and sometimes ranted) on politics and religion, his extensive travel overseas, his love for West Virginia (his home state) and Kansas (his childhood state), national crisis and international intrigue, beloved family and friends, and his work as a professor of sociology at a small liberal arts college. Often his insight created strong reactions: cheers or anger ("he told me it made his blood boil") or tears. Sometimes prophetic and always provocative, his words should give us pause today and call us to a better (and John would say *kinder*) world.

Gary McGrew, Editor, 2025

We all follow our public or private stories. One story leads a people to build, another to destroy. The new growth of militias, anarchists, cults, gun-toting fanatics, crazy bombers and the like is nothing more than an illustration of the supernatural power of the stories around which we organize our lives.

John Warner Jr., *Charleston Gazette*, 1997

A Better Story

I'm watching the morning news, trying to imagine how 39 seemingly intelligent people could kill themselves, taking turns so as to clean up the mess, spreading purple shrouds over one another as they made their preparations to fly away on a Hale-Bopp delivery service. Not so shocking these days!

Jim Jones and David Koresh taught us to take these things in stride. One charismatic nut preaches a doomsday message and finds a handful of followers ready to do his bidding.

I want to put this crazy news item into some kind of context.

Two stories first:

Last January, Judy and I took 21 Wesleyan students to Greece and Turkey for a travel seminar, and our trip focused on classical Greek civilization. This was our second trip, having taken a group in January 1996. Each trip focused upon the archaeological ruins, the birthing beds of Western culture.

We stood amid the ruins of the ancient Acropolis of Athens. We planted our feet on the stage of the Dionysian Theatre where long ago such masters as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Euripides presented the Oedipus cycle, Antigone, Lysistrata, and The Trojan Women to a boisterous audience and hence to the Western World. On the streets of ancient Corinth, we stood where St. Paul once preached, and we gazed upon the mountain where Sisyphus rolled his interminably tumbling stone.

In Ephesus, on the coast of modern-day Turkey, we saw the remains of one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the great Temple to Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. In Epidaurus on the Greek Peloponnes, we stood in the great theater where Hippocrates once plied his healing trade. I raced my students on the original Olympic track and poked fun at them for trying so hard to outrun an old man.

We climbed into the Trojan Horse on the plain of Illium and felt the same chilling wind that refreshed Achilles, Hektor, Priam and Paris.

We stood in the grave site where amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann discovered the so-called "Agamemnon's mask," and we stood beneath the Mycenaean Lion Gate where Clytemnestra waited to murder her faithless husband upon his return from a decade-long war fought over his brother's wounded pride.

I knew as I stood among those ivy-covered crannied walls that there was a story in it for me, and I have been searching the crystal ball to locate that story. I think I found it - and what, you may ask, does this have to do with the mass suicide in California?

In both instances I am impressed with the lengths to which a people will go to follow a story. You cannot picture the size and the grandeur of the Temple to Artemis. You cannot imagine the peace-creating power of the original Olympic Games, the beauty of Myron's Discus Thrower or a Bronze Charioteer formed by an unknown genius.

The wonders never end. I had visualized the Delphic Oracle to be a tiny cave where a woman studied entrails. Not so! This was a spectacular marble city in itself, constructed entirely of temples, treasuries, stadiums, theatres, all strung together with olive-lined marble walkways, dedicated to the art of prophecy.

What got into the minds of those ancient Greeks, that they found the courage and the genius to build a society which would serve as the model for European and later for American nations? Here was the inspiration for the fathers of democracy. Here was the art which energized Michelangelo. Here was the inspiration for the 19th century British poets. The Greek columns, friezes and the frescoes serve today as the model for the institutions of democracy, justice, and authority.

It was a story which drove them on. A story of a pantheon of gods and goddesses whom they never saw with their own eyes but in whom they thoroughly believed.

That story was challenged by the itinerant St. Paul as he peripatetically preached a new story amidst the temples and theatres of Greece and Asia Minor. He preached a good story, and you can witness its power in the cathedrals sprinkled across Europe, Latin America and America, in the schools, colleges, hospitals, the little brown churches in the Allegheny vales and small white chapels clinging to the ridges of an Appalachian mountain range, in the summer camps, the homes for the elderly, Habitat for Humanity, the passion for justice and the refuge from human suffering.

That was just a story too.

And so you have it. We all follow our public or private stories. One story leads a people to build, another to destroy. The new growth of militias, anarchists, cults, gun-toting fanatics, crazy bombers and the like is nothing more than an illustration of the supernatural power of the stories around which we organize our lives.

On Palm Sunday I attended the Forest Burdette United Methodist Church and heard Dr. Tom Bickerton reply to the rhetorical question, "Why should I organize my life around an ancient story?" To which the answer is that we all organize our lives around powerful stories.

Some stories are just more satisfying than others.

There is a 2,000-year-old story which has captured the imagination of millions of people in hundreds of lands. It is a story which makes people believe that life is worth living, that integrity counts, that justice must be served, that there is refuge for those who suffer, and that the universe is constituted under the commandment of love.

Friends, I hope some of you can drive through the streets of Buckhannon this spring. Here you will see an amazing sight.

Every tree along Kanawha Street, College Avenue, Florida Street, East Main and on the Wesleyan campus is decorated with a yellow ribbon. Each ribbon represents a prayer for Kelly Martin, a 1996 graduate.

Kelly graduated with a double major in psychology and sociology, even though she spent the fall term of her senior year living at Ruby Memorial Hospital, struggling with leukemia. We all believed, or wanted to believe, that Kelly had defeated the dreaded disease when she returned to school in February. In our senior sociology seminar, Kelly told how terribly lonely she had felt as she lay in that hospital bed day after day, surrounded by her family, of course, but not by her friends. Doctors forbade anyone to hug or even touch Kelly through her long months of ordeal, through the radiation and chemotherapy, the loss of hair, the sickness.

Kelly returned to Ruby Memorial late last autumn when she discovered that her enemy had returned. Her struggle against leukemia has entered a second frightful chapter. But this time Kelly knows she is not alone. The day before her bone marrow transplant last month, her parents drove her through the streets of Buckhannon that she might witness the thousands of yellow ribbons. On tree after tree, black after block, street after street. A yellow ribbon. A prayer.

The ribbons were tied to the trees by her friends and her sorority sisters who have wrapped their lives around that ancient story, that story which affirms life and tells us that we must share our joys and our sorrows as a great loving family. That's a better story than the one which claims a UFO will come down on the comet and take us up to la-la land if we eat applesauce and drink funny juice.

And Kelly, remember the ribbons when you think you are alone.

April 11, 1997

In the Long Run

Last summer when Congress passed the new minimum wage law, my Republican colleagues clamored that it would only cause more workers to lose their jobs - that the most significant effect of minimum wage laws is causing unemployment to rise. That makes apparent sense. You and I have both heard that one before.

The new law took effect on October 1, increasing the minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$4.75. On September 1 the rate will rise again by 40 cents, setting the new minimum at \$5.15.

I had never challenged the Republican claim, and I assumed it must be true that when the cost of labor rises, industry will purchase less of it. Makes sense, doesn't it? This time I checked the figures. Surprise! U.S. unemployment was at 5.2 percent last October when the law went into effect. The figure dropped three-tenths of a percent over the next six months. Unemployment for April was 4.9.

I am not an economist, and I know there are different ways to manipulate numbers so that you get different results. So I dug through records since 1950, a time during which Congress raised the minimum wage 16 times. I checked the current Economic Indicators Handbook for changes in unemployment rates, comparing figures for the month in which the minimum wage law took effect with figures six months afterward. Turns out that in nine out of 16 cases, unemployment rates were actually lower six months after the law took effect than in the month it took effect. And once there was no change, leaving only six cases where unemployment rates went up instead of down.

I told one of my Republican friends his argument was false, and he said if I could prove it, he would award me the Nobel Prize for economics. I'm still waiting.

Of course, everybody knows that some people will lose their jobs when the minimum wage rises, and we do not need a course in economics to figure that one out.

But in the long run, adjustments are made and people continue to work and find jobs. Moreover, if the effects were long-term, we might expect there should be no jobs or workers left at all, after 16 occasions when Congress caused workers to lose their jobs.

My point, however, is this: My Republican friends have no real interest in the welfare of workers at all. You might test this by asking your Republican friends where they stand on the issue of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

Certainly, by the same logic, some American workers lost their jobs when industries moved to Mexico and Argentina, and that will continue as jobs move South. Ross Perot pointed this out during the 1992 presidential campaign, when he spoke of the great "sucking sound" caused by Latin countries inhaling American jobs. I am pretty sure your Republican friends didn't lose much sleep over the workers who lost their jobs because of NAFTA.

Or ask those same Republicans where they stand on the issue of new technology. Certainly new technology disemploys workers. Many years ago I read that if technological advances had been stopped in 1940, it would have taken every adult woman (a sexist argument, I might add) in America 40 hours per week and 52 weeks per year just to handle the workload of telephone operators in 1960.

Of course, some operators lost their jobs when Bell Laboratories introduced phone-switching technology. Yet I hear no Republican complaint when such developments subtract jobs from the market. So clearly your Republican friends have no interest in the welfare of workers. They only use the argument to touch the soft and bleeding hearts of us "lib'rals."

No, your Republican friends like to point out, correctly, that some workers will lose their present jobs when minimum wage raises take effect. Yet the long-term effects do in fact benefit the American worker, as is also well-known by those same Republican friends. In other words, their argument utilizes an ounce of truth to mask a pound of lie.

Would we all really be better off if all those laws had been blocked by Republicans in Congress (as they always tried to do)? Sixteen laws ago, the minimum wage was 75 cents per hour.

So ask your Republican friends, where's the beef?

June 2, 1997

Teach or Preach

On Saturday, the West Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is planning to retire me, put me out to pasture. Well, I'll not retire from teaching, so my pasture will continue to be the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College.

But the church did notify me shortly before my 60th birthday last November that I am eligible to retire from the ministry, and after making certain that this would not affect my teaching career, I took the bait. Retirement income will kick in and pay me a small sum for the rest of my life.

To a large extent my story is almost identical to that of 10,000 other United Methodist preachers, but of course, each of us has followed our own individual path.

Let's start with a very large and powerful Methodist church in the heart of downtown Topeka, Kansas. Here is the church of Alf Landon and his daughter, Nancy Kassenbaum, of governors, congresspeople, mayors.

This is where my parents, new to the city and fresh off two homestead family farms in eastern Kansas, found a church home more than 60 years ago. I grew up in a powerful Methodist church, and the youth group pulled me in like a magnet.

By the time I graduated from high school in 1954, it was clear to me that my path would remain within the church, and I chose Baker University, the Methodist college serving eastern Kansas.

I read the books and passed the test for my license to preach before the end of my sophomore year.

In 1956 I was appointed to serve a "two point" student charge at Hiattville and Garland in southeastern Kansas. Garland was on the Oklahoma state line, and I drove 100 miles each way to commute between college and church.

Those weekends were just too exhausting, and my Monday morning classes came too early. After that junior year I had to drop that difficult assignment and devote myself more to studies in my senior year.

Which gave me time to court a pretty little freshman girl just back from India, where her parents and grandparents had served as Methodist missionaries for more than half a century. That courtship was the wisest thing I have ever done, and she has given me more joy than I ever could have hoped for.

Throughout my seminary years, I was torn between teaching and preaching.

I tried both.

We were married in July 1960, and I took another two-point charge that same summer. Weekend drives again, this time to Lisbon Falls, Maine. At least there were two of us this time to fill the tiny Volkswagen bug.

Serving those churches was really hard. We drove up, and I had to preach a sermon in April before the church would hire me, and we met a woman named Eleanor Trial, who proved her name in a thousand ways.

She wrote me a letter saying I had big ears and looked kind of funny. I've still got the same ears, and my looks haven't improved very much. She was my weekly trial, and her mother was another.

Her mother, "Gram" Starbird, promised me that she would read the hymnal every time she didn't like my sermon, and sitting in the second pew she probably read every hymn in the book a dozen times before I graduated from seminary and terminated my Lisbon Falls appointment.

After two more years of work toward my Ph.D., we took another appointment in Maine, this time in Livermore Falls.

At least this time we could live on the parish and not make those weekend trips.

I know now that those weekly trials were extremely important to me as I attempted to find my way into a ministry which was right for me.

I know now that my thought patterns were not quite right for a weekly sermon and a life in the parish.

I could never quite swallow the exclusivism necessary for a parish ministry.

While I had clearly accepted and endorsed Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I could never quite bring myself to believe that Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists did not also have quite legitimate paths to religious truth.

That ambiguity had a profound effect on my preaching, and it helped me see that the pulpit was not the right place for me.

I could never separate religion from politics.

Neither could Jesus or Isaiah or Amos. Feeding the poor seemed as important to me as right belief. Fighting racial prejudice seemed more important than proper doctrine.

I discovered that I was a religious and political liberal in a conservative Methodist parish, and I was not alone in that condition.

Many of my seminary friends found the same thing.

I opposed the war in Vietnam, and I opposed it vigorously. I carried a sign in front of the Pentagon in 1965. Didn't go over very big in the little churches north of Boston.

From the pulpit, I spoke of civil rights, and I spent my 1964 summer vacation working with the civil rights program in Mississippi. Didn't go over very big in the little churches north of Boston.

So the issues had become political for me.

While the national church, the newly "united" Methodist church, proclaimed a set of social doctrines, the Social Creed, almost identical to the Democratic national platform of the 1960s - support for the United Nations, support for civil rights laws, support for welfare programs and the War on Poverty, opposition to the Vietnam war, equal rights for women, support for Cesar Chavez and his United Farm Workers, support for gun control, opposition to capital punishment - I discovered that almost every member of my churches in Maine was a Republican who opposed almost every single plank of the United Methodist Social Creed.

That became the topic of my doctoral dissertation: the tension between what the national church proclaims and the political views of the members who sit out there in the pews.

This tension became a joke between me and a lot of my friends in the parish, but to others it was no joking matter. When one of our friends asked me what I thought of "mixed marriages," I replied that I did not think a Democrat should marry a Republican.

Another friend was chairman of the county Republican committee, and she took our son Peter to Augusta, Maine, once to meet Gov. King. The governor gave Peter a kiss and a dime. Peter became a Republican!

To make a long story short, I could not handle the tension, and it became more and more clear to me that my ministry could not be in the parish.

All the while I was completing a doctorate in social ethics at Boston University, serving as a graduate assistant and learning to teach, discovering that I was comfortable and happy in the university setting, not happy in the pulpit.

I found the path which I was to follow, and after three years of teaching in a small Presbyterian college in Kansas, I received a phone call from Dr. Howard Bright at West Virginia Wesleyan College. Would I want to interview for a job in West Virginia?

So here I am. I joined the West Virginia Annual Conference in 1970 and have served for 27 years, not in the pulpit but in the college, which is owned by the conference. I could not have found a happier and a more fulfilling career, and I have known at all times that this is the place where God wanted me to serve. But I have the very greatest respect for those parish preachers who have daily suffered the tensions which I discovered, whose ears are too big and noses are too long, who have listened too much to the Eleanor Trials of those parish appointments, have bitten their tongues and have lived productive and creative lives in spite of, or even because of, that daily pain. They are tougher than I was.

Each one of us who walks on the face of this Earth has a calling from our creator. It is a calling to serve in the building of His kingdom. Each one of you who reads this morning paper has been given a "call," a vocation, and you will not be satisfied with your life until you say "yes" to that calling. It "brooks no refusal."

On June 14, I will officially retire from the conference. But I will remain in the United Methodist pasture and serve until the very end. It has been, and continues to be, a life of joy and fulfillment.

June 9, 1997

A Country Physician

I told once before how Harold's lessons in chemistry at West Virginia Wesleyan College changed the course of sulfa drugs in America, and I told about the old man who wouldn't allow Harold to treat his wife until he cured the dog. Oh, the stories a doctor can tell.

Harold's a storyteller, and you'll love the tales told by this old West Virginia country doctor in his new book, "Doctor Stories in West Virginia."

Only these are not stories about animals. They are about real West Virginia people, many of whom lived deep in the forests of the Mountain State, back where nobody goes and nobody wants to go.

Except for this rural doctor who never drove a Cadillac.

To this day, the old physician drives a little green Jeep, an Upshur County symbol of a man who will go anywhere to help anybody who can't get into a hospital. He's a man living in the wrong century, a general practitioner in an age of specialists, a man who retired from the practice of medicine at the age of 75 because his knees and elbows wouldn't bend fast enough any more to do what he loved doing best.

Back in the 1960s when a new biology professor at Wesleyan College came to class drunk in his first week of teaching, Dean Orlo Strunk had to fire him. The dean called Dr. Almond and asked if he could teach the course, and Harold complied.

It was an 8 a.m. class, and several students walked in late every morning. It upset Dr. Almond, who often stayed up all night in the emergency room or into the wee hours preparing his lessons.

So he started telling stories - at 8 o'clock sharp. Those who came late to class missed the story. His students started coming to class on time, his stories became famous on the campus, and other professors used to corner him and ask for a preview of the latest story.

He has been a storyteller ever since. Many of his stories have appeared in *The West Virginia Hillbilly*. Now he has written a book.

Here was a child who stuck a pencil eraser up her right nostril and couldn't get it out. Her mother tried but succeeded only in pushing it deeper into the cavity. Harold analyzed the situation and told her mother to try a kind of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Mom had to pinch the child's left nostril and blow real hard into her mouth. Out popped the eraser, like the cork out of a bottle. Immediately the child admonished the doctor, "You're not going to charge us for that, are you? Mom did all the work!"

When Harold was in medical school at Northwestern University, he played a practical joke on one of the nurses at the hospital where he was an intern. Nurses in those days wore mosquito netting-type bonnets, and one nurse hated hers.

She took it off whenever she could.

One summer evening Harold slipped outdoors and caught a handful of fireflies. He secretly filled the bonnet with the little creatures, and the nurse put it on. When she entered a darkened room, the insects did their trick. Two patients laughed so hard it caused uproar in the hospital.

Next day, Harold was called to the office. The head honcho's stern words made Harold shake in his boots. Harold apologized but admitted he had wanted to do that for a long time, and now, having done it, it wouldn't happen again. His critic whispered, "I have wanted to do the same thing but never had the nerve to do it!"

Harold learned to make a breech delivery from an old country doctor named Basil Page. Early in his Upshur County practice, Harold called for help with a breech delivery, and Dr. Page came to the rescue.

The problem with a breech delivery is that when the baby's feet come out first, the arms somehow get themselves up over the head. That means the head has to come out with an elbow on either side.

The passageway is wide enough for a head, but not for a head and two elbows. The old doctor showed Harold how to rotate the infant so that the arms come down.

One day after a veterinarian friend of his killed a cow and a calf using the block-and-tackle method in a breech delivery, Harold taught veterinarians how to deliver a calf in the breech using the "Page technique."

Anyone who has ever watched the TV sitcom "M*A*S*H*" knows there is a gallows humor in the operating room. You are lying there under the sheet struggling for dear life, and the physicians in green suits are cracking jokes. (I found myself under the sheet in an emergency room in Los Alamos, New Mexico, one evening, and the physician pulled my sheet down farther than needed just to give the nurses a look-see. Guess they got their eyes full!)

In medical school, one of Harold's professors gave his students a list of "10 most wanted" diseases or disorders. Just like the FBI. These were rare malfunctions. Students who sat under said professor all learned to diagnose these 10 curiosities and were encouraged to keep their eyes open in watchful anticipation. These were diseases they might come across only once in a lifetime.

The physician who finds one feels like a teen-ager who finds a rare and desired baseball card, or the philatelist who finds that air-mail stamp with the plane printed upside down. Word quickly moves around the hospital, and other practitioners come to see the curiosity. Like when Tarzan visited London.

A doctor has to have a mind like Sherlock Holmes, Harold told me. The physician must have a vast amount of knowledge, a keen sense of observation and the ability to come to a diagnostic conclusion. Many times the physician must venture into the unknown, must use the trial-and-error method,

And must search until the answer is found.

In his lifetime of practice in Upshur County, Harold Almond found eight of the 10 "most wanted" diseases, and he added eight others to the list. He described a couple of these for me one night last week, but I got lost in the medical terminology.

His joy of discovery was not lost on me, however, and I am certain that the bearers of such rare diseases were better off for his gallows sense of curiosity.

Harold knew a Northwestern student who had a drooping eyelid, myasthenia gravis. In 1936 there were 46 known possible treatments for a drooping eyelid, so the doctor started with treatment "A" and worked through the alphabet to "P," which was the right treatment, and the drooping ended.

During World War II, Gen. Douglas MacArthur lost a lot of pilots who made mistakes in landing their aircraft. Pilots who fly too high run into oxygen problems, and when they hyperventilate, they lose the visual acuity needed to land.

Harold participated in an experiment at Northwestern for a dollar a day. It required medical students to climb into a partial vacuum box replicating conditions of high-flying pilots. One day in the box, the fellow next to Harold keeled over, and in trying to save his buddy, Harold almost lost his own life.

In "Doctor Stories in West Virginia" Harold Almond tells of treacherous and subzero nights on muddy and ice-covered roads, snakebites and black widow spiders, a baby named Margaret born to a dead mother, Chicago mobsters filled with gunshot wounds, the story of Dr. Cunningham of Pickens who treated a man for leprosy, blood-curdling tales from the operating room, and stories to warm your heart.

July 11, 1997

Best Laid Schemes

Sometimes things don't work out the way we plan them.

My wife's sister Pinky is married to a United Methodist preacher, and for the second time in his career Kirby worked out a pulpit exchange with the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Their first exchange took them to the little island of Guernsey, and we joined them for three wonderful weeks on that island in the summer of 1985.

This time Kirby exchanged with a preacher from Belfast, Northern Ireland, and again they invited us to spend three weeks with them. On August 6 we checked our luggage to Belfast and boarded the little puddle-jumper in Clarksburg.

While we waited in the Aer Lingus terminal in New York, an airline official wandered through the crowded room, came up to us, and whispered to me, "I'm going to bump you up to first class." So while some 200 other passengers were herded like so many cows into a great cattle car, we were ushered into the "premier" cabin at the front. A hostess greeted us personally with champagne, and we imbibed. She helped us with bags and purse, jackets and camera, and came back shortly with crackers and cheese. Of course, our seats were luxurious sofa chairs. We flew and dined in style. We had a two-hour layover at the Shannon airport, and arrived in Belfast at 9 a.m. Thursday. Kirby and Pinky were waiting.

At the Belfast parsonage I practically ran to the telephone, opened the phone book, and looked for the names "Gray" and "Auld." There they were, in ample supply, descendants of my own great-great-grandparents. I wish I could know more than that, but I do not.

After an hour or so of unpacking, etc., we boarded a bus to downtown Belfast. We ate lunch in the oldest pub in Belfast, a place called The Crown, opened in 1840 on Great Victoria Street near City Hall. I enjoyed my first pint of Guinness in Ireland - Northern Ireland, excuse me!

In the evening of that first day we drove to a castle on the waterfront. Here the Protestant King William III landed in 1690 in his successful campaign to defeat the Catholic (former king) James (Stuart) II, who had fled from England in 1688. That campaign terminated in the historically significant watershed battle, the Battle of the Boyne. Beside the castle I photographed a fine statue of King "Billy" - as the Protestants call their hero, their "George Washington." He's no hero to the Catholics!

At 11 p.m., as we were getting ready for bed, the phone rang. It was our son Steve in West Virginia. Our new granddaughter, Lacey, had just minutes before been diagnosed as suffering from a birth defect, an improperly developed heart. Debbie was sobbing hysterically in the background. Steve was calling from the hospital in Charleston. They were just loading Debbie and the baby onto a small plane to fly them to Ruby Memorial Hospital in Morgantown. This would require heart surgery, perhaps that night - they thought. They could not have been more distraught. And here we were, 3,000 miles away. We could only say prayers and wait.

Steve called again on the next evening. By now he understood the nature of the birth defect. There was a hole between the two ventricles in Lacey's heart which needed repair, and she lacked one artery connecting the heart to the lungs. The medical term for the very rare condition is "truncus arteriosus." Another artery had to be installed. But this did not require an immediate action, and her new cardiologist wanted to put a little more weight on her before they operated.

So for the next five days we continued our tour of Northern Ireland. We spoke on the phone every night and on August 12, Steve was very discouraged and depressed. We knew it was time to come home. We caught the next flight home, and two days later we were in West Virginia.

One of the finest pediatric heart surgeons in America, Dr. Gustafson, practices at Ruby Memorial, so Steve and Debbie put everything on hold and settled in to their new life in Morgantown, living at the wonderful Ronald McDonald House next door to Mountaineer Field, across the parking lot from the hospital.

"Dr. Gus" performed the operation on August 22, leaving the chest cavity open for three days. Later that evening I visited my darling little granddaughter, less than 2 months old, and looked into the chest cavity where I could see her little heart beating at the rate of 128 throbs per minute. They sewed her up on Monday, and she is recovering in the intensive care unit of the pediatric sixth floor of the hospital.

Steve and Debbie have returned to their home at Scott Depot only once each since they took Lacey to Morgantown. Their neighbors have mowed the grass.

We are thankful for many things: for the wonderful pediatric center in Morgantown, for "Dr. Gus" and Dr. Balian and the cardiac team who have given 'round-the-clock care to little Lacey, for the Ronald McDonald House and those who have made that house possible.

For the friends and neighbors who have helped Steve and Debbie in this family crisis, for friends and family in America and in Belfast, who have said prayers for all of us, for Steve and Debbie who have put their lives on hold and given themselves totally and completely - 24 hours of every day - to the one single task of saving the life of their little daughter.

And to the One who has blessed us with this precious life of a granddaughter whose presence among us has touched our lives so very much.

Robert Burns said it best. "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley."

Please say a prayer, if you will, for little Lacey.

Thanks.

September 19, 1997

Clearing the Air

Some poisons work fast, some slow. But poison does its job, and the damage can never be undone. I smoked between the years 1955 and 1978. I never smoked a cigarette, mind you, only cigars and some very pretty pipes. Besides, like our president, I didn't inhale.

I wrote my dissertation with the help of several thousand cigars. We drove out to Altadena, California, and lived with Judy's parents for eight months in 1966. Every morning I got up long before the rooster crowed, often at 3 a.m. I'd drive down to Sambo's on Colorado Boulevard, order a cup of coffee and buy a very tasty cigar. I wrote my dissertation at Sambo's - almost entirely before the sun came up. I drank a lot of coffee and I smoked a lot of cigars.

Somehow I thought that was pretty cool, smoking those cigars and those pipes, and I also considered it some small virtue that I didn't smoke cigarettes. In my whole life I never smoked one cigarette. Just a lot of cigars and a lot of pouches of tobacco.

Then one day I just quit. It was April of 1978, and I decided to start jogging. I figured out that I couldn't do both things, smoke and run. And I have been running now - at a pretty drudging pace - for nearly 20 years.

During those 23 years when I smoked, our three children were born. They were born into a home where their father smoked. I smoked for the first 16 years of Peter's life. I smoked for the first 13 years of Steve's life. And I smoked for the first nine years of Jennifer's life. I shouldn't have done that. Thank goodness Judy didn't smoke too.

One of the earliest memories of my childhood is of my daddy rolling his own cigarettes, pouring tobacco from a little red can and spreading it out upon that tiny piece of translucent paper. I can't ever remember my father smoking in the upper part of the house, so I'm pretty sure Mom made him smoke in the basement. And the basement was Dad's space, except for the washing machine.

But when I was 4 years old, and when Mom was pregnant with Don, Dad quit smoking. He just quit one day, and didn't take another puff until we were grown and out of the house.

Thanks, Dad, for quitting when you did.

Our three children are pretty smart and pretty healthy. But we know now that they would have been a little smarter and a little healthier if I hadn't smoked. So let me say it now: Pete and Steve and Jennifer, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done it. I can't give you back those extra points of IQ which you deserved and which I took from you. And when you cough at night and blow your nose - more than you ought to - you know who to blame. I'm sorry.

Of course, we didn't know then what we know now. I knew I shouldn't smoke, but I didn't know all the reasons why. Nobody ever spoke of secondhand smoke. Nobody used terms like "fetal damage" back in those days. So you can excuse me a bit for that, if you want to. I can't excuse myself for it though. But now we know. Smokers lower the intelligence and damage - or ruin - the health of their children. That's not just a theory, and that's not just some Gazette columnist ranting.

Smokers, I won't talk about what you do to yourselves.

I won't talk about the seven or eight years you subtract from your own lives. I won't speak here of the beautiful 22-year-old brunette student of mine who started chemotherapy the week she graduated from college - and whose mother smoked. I won't talk about Sam and Jim and Thad and Joe, my friends who all should be living now but who all killed themselves with "firsthand" smoke. I won't talk about the children and the wives they left behind to pick up the pieces.

But I will speak here of the things we do to our children when we light up those friendly little weeds. I'm using a 1997 Lexis-Nexis download which my librarian friends found for me, and some statistics Dr. Anthony Davies worked out for me.

This pulls together material from the American Journal of Epidemiology, the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, the Archives of Environmental Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the American Cancer Society, the EPA, and a lot of other resources which I won't list.

Children born of smoking mothers are, on average, 200 to 250 grams lighter than children born of nonsmoking mothers. As you know, the prognosis for low-birth-weight children is not very good.

Smoking mothers are less likely to "go full term."

Children born of smoking mothers will be less intelligent than those born of nonsmokers. Children born of smoking mothers will miss 7 million more school days this year than children born of nonsmokers.

Children born of smoking mothers will exhibit more behavioral problems than those born of nonsmokers, a lot more. Children born of smoking moms are about twice as likely to die during their first year of life, and the fetus of a smoking mother is about twice as likely to die before it is born - compared to nonsmokers.

Smoking reduces the flow of blood through the placenta to the fetus, and carbon monoxide from tobacco smoke decreases the supply of oxygen to the fetus. The oxygen a mother breathes is fed to the fetus. So is the carbon monoxide.

Mothers, when you smoke you are feeding carbon monoxide poison to your baby. Mothers, you are slowly strangling your baby every time you take a puff. And the girls who smoke in high school and college today likewise will strangle their babies, because they won't be able to quit. Their babies will suffer for it. A lot!

Remember how some of you had a harder time "getting it" in your algebra class, and you couldn't read as fast or remember as well as your classmates? If your mother smoked, that's part of the reason you had trouble. She was strangling you. Are you sure you want to do that to your own kids?

Yul Brynner said it better than I can say it. He said it the day before he died. Just don't smoke. From the grave that's what my four friends say. Sam and Jim and Thad and Joe are all speaking to us. Same words: Just don't smoke.

Thank you for not smoking. Your living children thank you. Your children who are not living thank you. Your unborn children thank you.

December 1, 1997

The Good and Bad of Travel

The rape of five U.S. college students in Guatemala is especially sobering to me because I am one of those professors most guilty of taking students on lots of off-campus trips. I read editorials and letters to the editor in several national newspapers chastising St. Mary's College for failing, in some way, to take proper precautions.

Let me be the first to recognize that there are dangers involved in travel, foreign or otherwise. Since 1972 I have taken 11 groups of West Virginia students to the U.S. Southwest for what I have called the Indian Studies class, or lately, the Native American Studies class. We have spent three weeks traveling in private cars or college vehicles in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. Sometimes I shudder to think what could have happened, or did happen, or almost happened.

I am familiar with almost every emergency room between Buckhannon and the Grand Canyon. I have rushed college girls to the emergency room in a Quonset hut hospital on a Navajo reservation - girls suffering from extreme diarrhea. When the nurse asked if one of the girls could give a "specimen," they all volunteered.

One of the adults on an early trip had a bad auto accident in Kentucky on the first day out. One student, driving home, pulled onto the shoulder of I-40 in Oklahoma, and the exhaust of her car set the weeds underneath on fire. The auto went up in flames.

I would like to control the consumption of alcohol on these trips, but I cannot make adults stay home in a tent when the sun goes down. It scares me to death to think what might have happened, but didn't.

Jack Dye was good at billiards, so he and a buddy pulled a Minnesota Fats scam on the Navajo reservation late one night while I was asleep. Jack played badly enough to encourage a few Navajos to play for money, and when the stakes went sky-high, Jack whipped the pants off the whole tavern. Dear Lord, I'm glad I didn't know about that one until the next morning.

For the past two years, Judy and I have taken groups of Wesleyan students to Greece and Turkey for a study and travel seminar. It was a glorious class. We spent an afternoon on the Acropolis, walked through the ruins of ancient Mycenaean and Minoan civilizations, saw the museum exhibits of the foundations of Western civilization, spent a day visiting the islands. We saw the Areopagus where St. Paul preached his famous sermon, and walked the streets of ancient Ephesus and Corinth.

And at night I did not try to control the behavior of 21 young adults. Sorry. I wanted them to enjoy Athens and Istanbul and their own independence. I don't think there is a good alternative to this plan.

Last January, one of my male students had his pocket picked in London, a stopover en route to Athens, and then got himself caught in a classic barroom scam on the streets of Athens. He was walking alone, contrary to my instructions, when a "friend" asked him to go out and have a drink with him. Two girls sat down at the table, and before the night was over, the bartender handed Don a bill for \$500!

Our daughter Jennifer spent her sophomore year studying at Manchester University in England. She learned a lot, and on weekends traveled all over England. She got herself a job at a fancy restaurant and one night served dinner for Prince Andrew and his guests. She still laughs about the drop of sweat which ran down her nose as she served one of the guests, the drop falling onto someone's plate.

She and a friend traveled throughout Europe on Christmas and Easter breaks, slept in youth hostels, and used a Euro-Rail pass to go from Sweden to Florence.

She spent a week on a sheep farm in Cornwall. Jennifer decided to stay in England for Christmas break, although if she had come home she very well might have been a passenger on the plane which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland - an explosion which killed several American students.

I spent a month in Jordan with a group of students and other professors. We were guests of King Hussein and Queen Noor one afternoon, meeting the royal couple in one of the palaces. We visited a refugee camp, stood on the Allenby Bridge which separates the West Bank from Israel. We literally looked down the barrels of hundreds of high-tech automatic rifles and machine guns as we walked the streets of this Middle Eastern nation.

Students walked the streets of Amman freely at night, visiting bars, drinking ouzo, talking with Jordanians. I found a wedding party and was invited to sit with them and enjoy the music and the dancing.

What to do? If some of you, in your wildest dreams, imagine that college students sit around at night playing charades and Trivial Pursuit with their professors, I can only say, hello out there!

January 26, 1998

A Time to Speak

I was a little disappointed but not much surprised to hear that our governor told the Methodists to mind their own business, so to speak.

Specifically, Cecil Underwood, a longtime United Methodist himself and regular delegate to the state conference, was responding to a resolution passed by that conference calling for an end to mountaintop removal strip mining. Underwood's reply was that such actions fall outside the church's primary role.

That was carefully worded! Of course, technically, the governor is correct! Jesus never mentions strip mining, and by that measure, it is not the primary role of the church to discuss strip mining. Nobody said it was!

But our governor, in his carefully worded statement, noted that the Methodists have been losing members in recent years, so I imagine he is implying that caring for our membership rolls is our primary role. Like the Nielsen ratings for the television networks.

Of course, there are times when the church must carry out chores which are indeed beyond its primary role.

It may be outside the primary role of the church to speak out against slavery, but there are times when we must do it. It might just be outside the primary role of the church to speak up for abused women and battered children, but there are times when the church must do it.

It may have been outside the primary role of the church to speak out against the horrors of the Third Reich, but there was a time when we should have done it, and our voice was miserably weak.

It might have been outside the primary role of the church to speak out against the Jim Crow laws of Mississippi or the lynch mobs of Alabama, but we needed to do it anyway, though for many years our voice was still and small.

I don't know what hymns our governor used to sing as he grew up in the Methodist Church, but where I came from, we often sang on Sunday mornings: "For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies this our hymn of grateful praise." And from time to time, we read together a Psalm which said, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, let us rejoice and be glad in it." So I guess I grew up thinking that while it was perhaps outside the primary role of the church to criticize Gov. Underwood for selling out to the powerful forces on the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line which prey upon this beautiful land, responsible stewardship of our natural resources was clearly one of the tasks of Christian living. And I never thought a good Methodist ought to spend a lot of time destroying the beauty of the earth.

Our governor has surrounded himself with a team of parrots who use fine-sounding words to disguise his plan of destruction. I hear them telling us that we need to develop a "scientific study" to settle the questions surrounding mountaintop removal. Of course, this deceptive team wants the strip mining to continue its devastating work all the while.

By the same token, I suppose, these voices would have called for a scientific study to determine the long-term effects of the Holocaust before taking action against it, and would have done the same with Jim Crow laws, lynching, child and spouse abuse, and so forth. These are not scientific questions, and they cannot be analyzed scientifically. "Science" is just a smoke screen.

These are religious and moral questions, and I wonder what the primary role of the church might be if it is not to speak to these issues. Of course, we Methodists believe that mountaintop removal is outside the primary role of Gov. Underwood, too, and we said as much at our annual conference. The destruction of the beauty of the earth is certainly a religious and moral issue. And as we took that vote, I just wondered how many folks in that assembly had posted "Another Democrat for Underwood" on their front lawn 18 months ago.

July 27, 1998

School Consolidation

This is really sad. The West Virginia School Building Authority continues blindly down its path of destruction, taking into consideration not one single shred of evidence to support what it is doing. But destruction is what the SBA achieves. With your money and your blessing, dear readers.

Eight years ago, I put up a pretty good fight against school consolidation. I fought it on West Virginia Public Television and in the Gazette, in the courtrooms in Clay and Greenbrier counties, and in open school board meetings in Randolph, Preston and Mason counties.

I lost, of course. So did West Virginia children and the folks who live in the wonderful small towns of this state.

I argued then, and I argue now, that the work of the SBA destroys the children of this state. I had less empirical evidence at that time. I have more now, and the information is just too sad.

These guys are supposed to be educators. They are supposed to encourage our children to learn and employ the benefits of science. Yet, in their own work they disregard or reject the very method which they espouse for their children. For the best scientific research has shown again what we have known for many years: Consolidation destroys children.

The research I discuss here is not my own. I am indebted to many hard-working souls whose labor I will share with any individual or school board who requests my sources. This information is based on cold, hard numbers computed through the best scientific methods we know.

Consolidation does not save money. Countless studies have proven that. In many cases the cost per student increases with consolidation. Consolidation does not improve student performance, contrary to the theory espoused by the icon of American education, Dr. James Conant. Bad and ill-informed theory that.

Conant argued in his book, "The Comprehensive High School," published 31 years ago, that a larger school would provide an economy of scale and allow for more specialized classes, a greater variety of activities. Well, he was right about the variety and the specialization. What he implied, of course, was that this would improve American education. In that he was not correct. Implemented, the theory has destroyed the very thing he wished to improve.

We know now that the expanded curriculum benefits only a very small minority of children. On the other hand, we also know that as school size expands, student participation decreases.

We know now that the students shipped in from rural communities participate less in school activities than they did in their own small community schools. We know now that attendance drops and truancy and behavior problems increase as school size grows.

Controlling all other variables, we know now that the use of cigarettes, chewing tobacco, alcohol, and controlled substances increases with the size of the school. We also know that consolidation is a major cause of school violence.

The list is very long. Teacher-student interaction is damaged by large schools. Small schools are more flexible and adaptable to the particular needs of that school. The children of poverty fare the worst in the move to consolidation. Parental involvement decreases as schools consolidate. Small communities are ruined when they lose the centerpiece of community life.

So why does the SBA continue to impose its treacherous will upon the small communities of West Virginia? It's like the story in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible." Once you've destroyed a few lives, you've got to keep on doing it or else you'd have to admit you were wrong. And what bureaucrat has ever been wrong?

We read that student achievement scores have been going down over the past several decades.

Did it ever occur to anybody that the years covered by this discouraging revelation are identical to the years in which we have been consolidating our schools?

Did anybody ever notice that while departments and schools of education have multiplied, and while the bureaucratic accrediting agencies placed more and more demands upon those schools and departments, school violence has increased and student performance has been going down?

Does anybody notice anything wrong with this picture?

Hello out there! We've ruined the children. Does anybody hear me? Does anybody care? Is anybody out there?

The emperor has no clothes.

August 24, 1998

Quite the Contrary

When Judy and I took our first group of Wesleyan students to Greece and Turkey for a travel course in 1996, we stayed in a beautiful hotel in Heraklion, Crete, for three nights. A short walk down the hill led to a Venetian castle at the harbor on the Mediterranean Sea, and two blocks above the hotel nestled El Greco Park, commemorating the great 16th-17th century artist.

Although we traveled with a wonderful and inquisitive group of students, I confess they made a bit of noise at night, and one of the adults in our group, angered and embarrassed by the students, commented the next morning that these were the proverbial "Ugly Americans."

The next night a new group of youngsters - this time kids from Brazil - filled the second floor of our Hotel Atrion, and they made even more noise. Lots more noise. Our Wesleyan students were not "Ugly Americans." They were just a bunch of excited and happy teen-agers, like the kids from Brazil.

I have often heard my friends and colleagues refer to the "Ugly Americans," tourists who make a bad name for our country, and I have become convinced that William Lederer, with his book by that title, gave us an unjust moniker. In my travels I have not found that people in other lands consider us "ugly." Quite the contrary.

When we lived in Cambridge, England, in 1977-78, there was a sweet little lady in the flat next door. She used to tell us "Thank you." "For what," I asked one day. "Thank you, America, for saving us." She was referring to our role in World War II.

That summer we drove our Volkswagen mini-bus from Cambridge to Athens, camping all the way. I remember especially an evening in Yugoslavia, camping along the shore of the Adriatic Sea, when the campground director made a special effort to spend a few moments with his American guests, to ask the names of our children, and in a nonverbal way let us know that he was proud to host an American family.

A few days later we landed in Athens, Greece, and by great good fortune found a bed-and-breakfast where our hostess, Mrs. Dido, cared for us through a night of terrible tummies. She took special pride in the fact that she was caring for an American family. Certainly she did not consider Americans "ugly." The next night, tummies fixed, the restaurant owner served us a special desert, "on the house," and took us on a tour of his kitchen. His waiters were slow to bring our food because they were watching "Dallas" on the kitchen TV.

I spent part of the summer of 1987 in Amman, Jordan, with a group of American professors.

We spent an afternoon at the palace of King Hussein and Queen Nour - herself an American woman who grew up in Cleveland. I reminded the king that he had once given a marble altar to West Virginia Wesleyan College. The king and queen invited our group to attend opening night at the Jerash International Arts Festival later that week, and while our Jordanian hosts made it clear they did not agree with U.S. Middle East policy, they truly loved and admired America. They were proud to host us, and some were quick to brag that they had studied at an American university.

We spent an afternoon watching open-heart surgery performed by a surgeon who had studied with the famed Dr. Michael De Bakey in Dallas, Texas. Clearly, they did not consider Americans "ugly."

In 1993, Tom Cline and I spent three weeks with a group of Wesleyan students in Sofia, Bulgaria. Twice during that frigid winter visit I spent the evening with Professors Todor and Albena Tanev, social scientists at the University of Sofia. Over and over, they told of their love for America.

Their favorite novelist was F. Scott Fitzgerald, and when they once visited America they made a special effort to visit his grave. Todor's grandmother almost emigrated here, but sold her ticket after the tragedy of the Titanic.

Todor told how - as a little boy in 1969 - he and his father secretly and illegally watched a Greek television station which carried the landing of the American space ship on the moon, and how they and others in the group clapped when Neil Armstrong spoke his famous words, "One small step"

Todor and Albena reminded me that the Statue of Liberty stands as a symbol to all the world, and that she faces out rather than in. She is a symbol more for those who dream of America than for those of us who live here, they told me.

We have our problems. We have made our mistakes. But we are not alone in that, and I have become convinced that for many people who do not live here this is truly "America the Beautiful." The life we live in this great land is for many who do not live here only a dream. And for that I am thankful.

Very thankful.

November 26, 1998

Season of Stories

I made a special effort to look at the planet Mercury one cold morning last week. Mercury is the speeding planet, the one closest to the center of our solar system, and is pretty hard to see because it is so near the sun. To find this elusive creature of the night, I have to follow my Star Date magazine and hope for a few clear nights when the planet might not otherwise be visible.

Shortly before sunrise, I drove up to the parking lot at Union School outside Buckhannon to get a clear view of the eastern horizon. There he was, Hermes the fleet of foot, Mercury to the Latin tongue, just under the nearly new moon, bright and glorious in the pre-dawn sky. I saw the "star in the east."

I did not think of it then, but there I was on a cold winter night, drawing myself into a story of mystery and power, silently and in complete isolation contemplating the wonders of the universe and its creation. I say a story of mystery and power, for in this darkest season of the year, this time of living indoors instead of out, we little human creatures are forced to dwell closer to one another, to sit beside each other and huddle just to fend off the cold. And we tell the stories which will carry us through the other months of the year.

It is in this chill of winter that grandchildren sit on grandfathers' laps and daughters join their mothers beside the kitchen stove to mix sugars and seasonings in this season of cookies and spice. And to stay warm. It is now that we are drawn to one another by the force of external chill. This is when stories are told.

At other times, fathers are busy cutting the grass or rushing off to the office. At other times, mothers rush to drop the little ones at the day-care center on their way to work, and girls and boys chatter beside their lockers or scream on the soccer field.

Now we make time to tell stories, for this is the season of make-believe, and stories have to be told.

Stories of Persian astrologers riding their camels - from somewhere in the east - following a star to a place called Bethlehem, stories of shepherds and innkeepers and kings and angels and a child and a virgin and a proud but mystified husband named Joseph. We don't talk about Persian astrologers and shepherds at the lunch counter or the cash register. We save those images for times like these.

The stories we tell take us far from our everyday world and weave images of creatures we seldom see on the Monday mornings of our lives. We use a special language when we pass these tales down to our children. We don't say, "See, there was this guy."

We say, "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." We don't talk that way at work. We reserve those words for special occasions, and this is such a time. We tell these stories in a dialect reserved for dark nights with little ones sitting on grandfathers' laps.

We tell these stories beside a log burning in the fireplace. We talk this way beside a tree brought in from the cold, a tree decorated with tinsel and glass balls, with popcorn and cranberries, a tree quite out of place were it not for the season.

But it is the season, and that makes it OK to do the things we would not consider in our ordinary lives.

This is the season of songs and dances, of nutcrackers and toy soldiers, the season of mischievous mice and sugarplum fairies and faraway lands called Russia and the like. This is the season of holly and ivy and ice skaters and reindeer and sleighs and rooftops and chimneys and a jolly old elf and other imaginary creatures who people our make-believe world.

This is the season of wassail and carols, of children singing on our doorsteps, singing of a little town and a bleak midwinter, of angels on high and silent stars, singing words of ransom and exile - words we seldom use on the Mondays of our lives.

This is the season of memories, of grandma's house and Uncle Bill, now long in his grave, of notes from friends we have not seen for 30 years, yet who remain as close to us as our next-door neighbors, principally because of the cards we send to one another at this time of year.

This is the season of make-believe. But here it is that we create out of just such stories the real and everyday world which we will occupy in warmer days. Now we surround ourselves with children and with make-believe stories as we huddle against the cold winter nights, but from these tales of far-away places with strange-sounding names we construct the world which we will inhabit when the days are not so short and the evenings not so cold.

From these tales we will build a world where justice rolls down like the waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream, where swords will be turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, where the wolf will live with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the kid, a world where old men will dream dreams and young men will see visions, a world of peace and good will.

These stories of make-believe become our dreams, our dreams become our inspirations, and from these inspirations we build the world which we will inhabit.

On this morning, with mothers warming the sweet rolls and grandchildren sitting on grandfathers' laps, we will read again these glorious words, and from these words we will build our world.

"For we have seen his star in the east, and we are come to worship him."

December 21, 1998

Lies and Politics

Partisan "justice" is ubiquitous. Republicans want President Clinton removed from office, and they find or invent their reasons accordingly. If one reason will not fit, they find another. If it's not about money, it's about sex. If it's not about sex, it's about dishonesty. Whatever!

I asked two groups of students this fall for a show of hands. I asked them to "vote" by political persuasion. Those who lean to the Republican side overwhelmingly wanted the president impeached. Those who leaned the other way opposed impeachment.

So none of us is able to think impartially, as became so very clear on December 19 when Republicans in the House of Representatives, outnumbering Democrats, voted almost unanimously to impeach Clinton, while Democrats by about the same margin voted no.

It's not about sex, the Republicans say - now that they are falling into their own sex scandals. It's about lies - as if these self-righteous liars are the honest ones.

If a president tells us lies, I hear them say, over and over, we can't trust him. And if we can't trust him, we should impeach him. Before that crazy and tragic moment, December 19, 1998, nobody ever in the history of America considered impeaching a president because he didn't tell the truth. Never!

That's just a rationalization Republicans make up to justify what they want to do in their mood of vengeance and rancor. That's just another lie told by the tobacco lobby and the opponents of national health care to get their able opponent out of office.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves of another American president who told us all a pack of lies. Not lies about a private matter, but lies about foreign policy and the Cold War, lies which caused the failure of a nuclear test ban treaty and disarmament summit and which threatened the safety of planet Earth.

Yet I heard no call for impeachment from the Republicans in Congress when they heard their own man tell his notorious lies.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was considered an especially honest man. We might disagree with him or think he was sleeping on the job, or claim that he played golf instead of going to work, but at least he was honest - we thought.

His reputation for honesty was especially important for the Paris test-ban summit meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in May 1960.

But Eisenhower had approved a CIA plan to send U2 reconnaissance planes over the Soviet Union, beginning in 1956, in violation of international law. Of course, the plan had to remain secret.

On May 1, 1960, just days before the upcoming Paris summit, Ike received a memo from the CIA reporting that a spy plane was missing, a U2 flown over the Soviet Union by expert pilot Francis Gary Powers. The plane had taken off from a base in Adana, Turkey, en route to Norway, overflying the USSR while snapping military photographs.

By May 2, the CIA assumed that Powers had crashed or been shot down, probably somewhere in the USSR. Powers' instructions were to blow himself and his plane to smithereens rather than to fall into enemy hands. The CIA trusted Powers to do just that in case of emergency. So the CIA - and Eisenhower - felt safe that no one would ever discover that we were spying on the Russians.

Or if the Soviets knew, they could never prove a thing.

Ike kept his mouth shut.

But on May 5, Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced to the world that a U.S. spy plane had been shot down while flying over Soviet territory, and he angrily denounced the American "aggressive imperialist" provocation. He accused U.S. militarists of seeking to undermine the upcoming disarmament talks.

Ike lied in order to preserve his reputation for honesty. He approved a statement made by NASA that a U.S. meteorological plane flying over Turkey had apparently strayed into Soviet air space, thus accounting for the Soviet report.

On May 7, Khrushchev reported to the world that parts of an American U2 spy plane, shot down 1,300 miles inside Soviet territory, were being held on display in Moscow, as was the American pilot, "alive and kicking," one Francis Gary Powers. They also held the film that Powers had snapped of Soviet military installations.

Eisenhower then issued a statement denying that Powers had been authorized to fly over Soviet space. To protect his own reputation, Ike placed the blame on lower-level military commanders. He continued the cover-up with misleading press releases until May 9.

At last President Eisenhower was forced to tell the truth. If he blamed lower-level commanders for the blunder, this would play into the hands of his critics, who claimed he was sleeping while on his watch. He bit the bullet and confessed to us all.

Supporting the president, the American press released several news stories reporting an imminent and renewed Soviet threat to American security. One headline read: "U.S. Vows to Defend Allies if Russians Attack Bases."

The reports were not accurate reflections of immediate danger but attempts to justify the lies our president had told us.

The Gary Powers incident destroyed the planned Paris summit. On the table were détente and disarmament in the midst of an extremely dangerous Cold War. President Eisenhower's violation of international law and the lies he told had destroyed the conference.

For all of that, the American public heard no clamor for impeachment from those Republican Honest Abes. Not even from the Democratic side of the aisle did we hear the call for impeachment.

So it makes me just a little suspicious when I listen to the self-righteous Republicans telling us that it's President Clinton's dishonesty that made them vote for impeachment. I suspect that's not the reason.

Folks, this is all about hardball politics, a game that two can play.

January 4, 1999

King Hussein

When Dr. Stanley Martin built the new chapel at West Virginia Wesleyan College in the late 1960s, he wanted it to possess an ecumenical flavor.

He wrote to several religious and national leaders. The pope sent two gold candlesticks, which are on display in the vestibule. King Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan sent a huge piece of Jordanian marble to serve as an altar for the new chapel, and also paid shipping costs for what turned out to be a beautiful six-ton worship center.

Chapel builders had to remove the floor and reinforce it with extra steel girders in order to contain the gift. The altar stands today in the small West Chapel in Wesley Chapel, a tribute to the friendship of an Islamic world leader.

When I was invited to visit Jordan in 1987, under auspices of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, I carried with me a photo of the altar and one of the chapel, just in case I met the king. And on a beautiful July afternoon I, along with 11 other American college professors, including Gazette columnist Dr. Jerry Beller, shook hands with King Hussein and Queen Noor. I showed them the photos and thanked them for the gift.

They have been heroes of mine ever since, and I wanted to write this small note in appreciation of those great world leaders.

When King Abdullah, first monarch of the infant nation of Jordan, approached the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on July 20, 1951, a deranged Palestinian youth stepped forward and murdered him. Standing beside his grandfather as he died on the steps of the mosque was the young Hussein, the 16-year-old boy soon destined to rule his people for nearly half a century.

The boy was also the great-grandson of Sharif Hussein, father of Abdullah and recognized as the Grand Sharif of Hejaz, keeper of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Sharif Hussein was emir of the ruling family of a region in western Arabia known as the Hejaz, a land of mountains and valleys, the backbone of a continental rift, in the Hashemite Kingdom of bedouin shepherds, camel drivers, and blowing sand, a desert nation. In this position, the Grand Sharif Hussein was supervisor of the Islamic hajj, the pilgrimage taken by all Islamic faithful, the visit to the sacred city of Mecca required of all Muslims.

During World War I, Col. T.E. Lawrence - "Lawrence of Arabia" - recognized the strategic role to be played by the Grand Sharif and the Hashemite ruling family, and engaged them in the war against the Germans and the Turks. At the port city of Aqaba, Lawrence and the Bedouin warriors attacked and drove the Turks out of that strategic fortress - the story told in that great Oscar-winning film.

Abdullah and his brother Feisal played a major role in the defeat of Germany, and when the war was over and the Ottoman Empire was carved up, Great Britain rewarded the brothers with pieces of the broken empire. Feisal was given Syria and later Iraq, while Abdullah was given Jordan (Transjordan).

Although Feisal was driven out of Syria by the French, he remained emir of Iraq until his death in 1933. Abdullah survived to govern Jordan until 1951.

Another more powerful family on the Arabian peninsula, the family of Ibn Saud, drove the Hashemites out of Arabia and established the kingdom known as Saudi Arabia.

When Abdullah fell at the mosque in Jerusalem, the ruling powers of Jordan realized that his son, Tallal, was emotionally unstable and incapable of guiding the nation. They placed their trust in the 16-year-old Hussein, son of Tallal, grandson of Abdullah. But Hussein was too young, so Tallal was temporarily installed as king.

One year later, while Hussein was studying in England, Tallal was removed, and his son, now 17, was called home to assume the throne.

King Hussein was a small man with a quiet and almost hesitant voice. He seemed hardly the leader one might expect to serve as a major player in the peace process in that volatile region of the world.

He made mistakes. He was suckered into the 1967 war with Israel, and Israel's six-day victory cost the Palestinians their home on the West Bank of the Jordan River.

Our group visited a U.N. refugee camp in Jordan, a shanty home for thousands of Palestinian refugees who might otherwise have their own nation now - were it not for the Six-Day War.

Hussein allowed Yassar Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization to use Jordanian bases to attack and harass Israel, and this led to a further breakdown in Middle Eastern politics. Later the king had to go to war against the PLO to drive them out of Jordan. They left Jordan and moved into Lebanon, which of course, led to the breakdown of that small nation as well.

But the king has played a major role in the peace process and has been a moderating force in the Middle East, a broker between Israel and the Arab nations.

While we visited Jordan in 1987, we learned that the king's oldest son, Prince Abdullah, named after the first king of Jordan, was away in England studying in the British military college, Sandhurst. At that time the king's brother, Hassan, was crown prince, and Hassan remained in that position until this past January, when the king named Abdullah the new crown prince.

Many have wondered whether the king made the best decision when he replaced Hassan with Abdullah. I think he made the correct move. Hassan is a fine scholar, administrator and economist, while Abdullah is a military man. But frankly, Abdullah is the charismatic one, the son with his father's wit, twinkling eye and strength of leadership. Abdullah will have to grow into his new role as king of that small nation, and he will have to prove himself, just as his father did before him.

But the community of West Virginia Wesleyan College will continue to hold a special place in our hearts for the king who gave us the great marble altar, and his son who rules now in his place.

The king is dead. Long live the king.

February 12, 1999

How to Pass a Levy

The good folks in Upshur County passed the school bond levy on May 16, and they passed it by 604 votes. Well done, good friends! We failed to pass that levy four times since 1993, but the schools will now function in the black and our children will have new textbooks.

I was not among that powerful group of parents who worked to pass the levy. Nor did I see many grandparents there. It was the next generation who did the work, and we are proud of them. But I did attend one meeting, and I passed a tip on to that committee which might have helped. I think I should pass the tip on to others in the same boat. To do that, I will tell a small story.

When I attended that one meeting, I found the group working hard to change voters' minds, working to list the many good reasons to vote yes on May 16. In other words, they were working to convince their opponents that they were right and the opponents were wrong. "If you could only see things my way, you would realize how foolish you are," seemed to be their strategy.

I suggested an alternative.

I didn't cut my political eyeteeth on school bonds or local elections. I was an older child of the 1960s (a graduate student in Boston), and the battles then were civil rights issues and Vietnam. Demonstrations, marches and civil disobedience were our tactics. Times have changed.

Soon after I began teaching at the College of Emporia, a small Presbyterian school in Kansas, I started working to elect Eugene McCarthy as the next U.S. president. Judy and I joined a small group of students and teachers who drove north to Nebraska to work in the primary elections in the spring of 1968. We worked one weekend in Omaha and another in Nebraska City, talking to people and passing out McCarthy literature. In Omaha, we met McCarthy's brother. In Nebraska City, we stayed overnight with a retired Methodist preacher and his wife.

The old preacher, learning that I was a sociologist, gave me a scrapbook of political cartoons he had taken from the Chicago Tribune, cartoons from the 1930s and 1940s. I still use those cartoons in class.

I think those trips to Nebraska saved my hide, for the students in Emporia invited Judy and me to attend a party they called a "Love In" on the Saturday we were in Omaha. Some students smoked marijuana there, and the two teachers who did attend the party got fired. I have always been glad I was in Omaha instead of Peter Pan Park.

In Omaha and Nebraska City, Judy and I worked the precincts on the "wrong side of the tracks," the Democratic precincts, and that experience made an impression on me.

That same year, during which Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were killed, we worked in Emporia to help elect a McCarthyite Democrat to Congress. So in Emporia again we walked the "wrong side of the tracks," getting out the vote among Hispanic Santa Fe yard workers and others most likely to vote Democrat.

But in 1969, soon after the country sent Richard Nixon to the White House, the Lyon County (Kansas) Board of Education offered a school bond levy, so Judy and I worked the precincts again. This time we all worked the Republican precincts of Emporia, the precincts where "getting out the vote" meant helping to pass the levy. Leaders of that campaign did not want us to work the poor neighborhoods. They will vote no, they told us.

There was my lesson, and I passed it on to the mothers and fathers in Upshur County working to pass the school bond levy here. "Your job is not to convert your opponents but to get out the vote among those who will support you," I suggested. And friends, I think that's how Upshur County passed the first school bond levy since 1993.

May 24, 1999

The Story of This Century

If I were to tell the story of this century, which has burned itself down to the last candle, I would start three years before with the cyclone of 1897. Except for my cousins, nobody else today knows about the cyclone of '97, because it was too small and insignificant to make the county newspaper. But it was large enough to blow away the little house on the Kansas prairie where George and Ettie Gray lived. They and Albert, Alice, and Lawrence, that is. Those three were little kids then, and my Mom wasn't born yet, but that cyclone scattered the clapboards of that Kansas farmhouse halfway across Clay County, and they were just lucky enough, or farsighted enough, to run to the storm cellar where they waited until it was over.

I'd tell how Judy's grandparents went to India at the beginning of this century so they could "save the world for Christ in this generation," and how in 1942 Judy's parents whisked their family out of India because the war was coming too close.

I would tell how Mom used to play the piano for the local cinema before they had talkies, and how Grandpa Warner never learned to shift gears properly in the Model-something he drove before any of his friends were rich enough or brave enough to put a car onto the dirt roads of Jackson County.

Dad always joked that Grandpa never learned to cuss, but how it would have saved him an ulcer or two if he could have let loose with a couple of bad words when he couldn't downshift going up a hill. Dad never had ulcers.

I'd tell how Peter Warner, my grandfather, sat as chairman of the local school board in Whiting, Kansas, and how he properly fired the first biology teacher who tried to tell his students that they had evolved from the monkeys.

Grandpa would have fit right in with the current philosophers of my home state.

I'd tell how Dad got a scholarship to do graduate research in wind technology at Kansas State, and how he built a windmill on top of the family barn on that Jackson County farm to harness the afternoon breeze, and how he never finished those studies because it was the Depression and the money ran out. Besides, Roosevelt's REA strung electric lines across the Midwest and hooked those farm houses up so they didn't need the wind anymore.

Dad always thought that was a little bit sad because, although it helped the farmers then, the REA prevented America from developing the wind.

I'd tell how the phone number at Grandma Gray's house was three shorts and a long, and how I often wondered if Beethoven got his idea from Grandma's phone number. Well, he lived long before Alexander Graham Bell, so he probably didn't.

I'd tell how Dad was too old to go to war, thank goodness, but he worked on the telephone switchboards at the SAC base in Topeka between 1942 and 1945, and how we used to turn out all the lights when they rang the sirens. I'd tell about the knock on the door and the midnight telegram reporting that my cousin Jack was missing in the Pacific, and how they later declared that his plane went down and he was presumed dead.

I'd tell how I was a lifeguard at the YMCA indoor swimming pool in Topeka the day Roger Bannister put his name in the history books, and how I graduated from Topeka High School in the same week the Supreme Court ruled that Linda Carol Brown didn't have to go to the Negro school in Topeka. I'd tell how Grandma Gray took her first ride in an airplane when she was 83 years old, and how I flew across America to get married in California.

I'd tell how I was walking down the steps at Boston University when a friend told me that President Kennedy was shot, and how we drove over to Concord on the day of the funeral to watch and listen to the 21-gun salute fired at the same spot where, nearly two centuries before, a shot was fired that was heard around the world.

I'd tell how I sat with my feet in the reflection pond on the day Martin Luther King said he had a dream, and how I was in Laurel, Mississippi, on the day they found Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodwin under a dam in the next county over.

I'd tell how my teacher in Claremont, California, showed me how to use a computer back in 1966, and how I punched numbers into pieces of cardboard you weren't supposed to spindle or mutilate.

I'd tell how I campaigned for Eugene McCarthy in Nebraska City, and how we were camping at Mesa Verde on the day Bobby Kennedy was shot. I'd tell how Jennifer was born just a few days after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I'd tell how Jennifer decided not to come home from England for Christmas in 1988, and how that's the reason she wasn't on the plane that went down over Lockerbie, Scotland, on that sad winter day.

I'd tell how our children grew up in Buckhannon and went to college and got jobs and then got married, and what it's like to get cheap coffee because the waitress thinks I'm a senior citizen.

I'd tell what it's like to be grandparents in West Virginia when the millennium comes to an end, and how our next grandchild will be born just a few weeks into the next one. And I'm hoping he or she will have a century to tell just as exciting as the 20th has been for me, but for goodness sake I hope the next one will be a little kinder.

November 30, 1999

Bulgarian Scholar

Every year since 1991, West Virginia Wesleyan College has sent two members of the faculty and eight students to spend January in Bulgaria. This winter, Kwame Boateng and Dee Dee Dunlavey will make the trip.

In 1993, Tom Cline and I led the group, and those three weeks were among the coldest I have ever experienced. Not only was it 3 degrees below zero when we stepped off the plane, but this Eastern European nation just emerging from Soviet rule lacked many of the essentials we take for granted. They simply didn't have enough power to keep the city warm in this very cold winter, and I slept fully dressed with my topcoat over my blankets. The city is built around the beautiful Alexander Nevsky Basilica, named in honor of the Russian Tsar Alexander II who liberated Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878.

One of the treasures I took home from Bulgaria is a photo of celebrants lighting candles in the basilica just before the Orthodox Mass.

In Bulgaria and other Eastern Orthodox nations, the church observes St. Ivan's Day on January 6 with ceremony and celebration. In Sofia, the nation's capital, a bishop throws a wooden cross into the river, and hearty young men dive in to retrieve the floating crucifix with the promise of good luck for the one who captures the prize.

Because the trolley system was crowded and confusing, Tom and I walked to and from our respective homes in the northwestern sector of the city to the Cyril and Methodius Institute, the agency that sponsors the Wesleyan group each January. During these walks we witnessed the ubiquitous Gypsies begging or "gypping" fools at shell games, but their life as a Balkan pariah is very sad.

My hostess was a young woman, an architect named Christina Christova. I stayed with her mother and father, who spoke no English, and Christina often accompanied me in my exploration of the city. One day Christina led me through the impoverished Gypsy Quarter and introduced me to a man I refer to as the "King of the Gypsies."

Christina and her husband, Tony, took me to a party at her cousin's house on St. Ivan's Day. Because her cousin was named Ivan, or John in English, this was his name day. They pointed out to me that it was my name day, too, and I also received several small gifts.

We traveled through Bulgaria, viewing a great Roman theatre and skiing on a wonderful mountain that overlooked Macedonia to the south. Late in the afternoon I took the ski gondola halfway down a lonely slope, whereupon the darned thing came to a complete halt and left me hanging 100 feet in the freezing air for half a hour.

I believe I was the only passenger on the gondola, and I am certain they didn't know - or care - that I was there. I sat wondering whether it was better to kill myself in a great leap to the ground or allow the frost to take me while sitting through the night in the frozen chair.

Eventually the thing began to move, and I am still alive.

One of our pleasant chores was to meet a handful of candidates who had applied to study for two years at West Virginia Wesleyan College. Tom and I met the most brilliant young men and women in Bulgaria, all of whom had achieved nearly perfect scores on their SATs.

After the regular students left the institute, our hosts brought a 15-year-old boy named Emil before us. He was not old enough to apply for the Wesleyan scholarship. And frankly, he was far too bright to come to Buckhannon. He had not scored an 800 on the SAT math portion; he had scored an 800 on the SAT Math II, the exam given only to unbelievably brilliant scholars.

I was certain, after our interview, that this was by far the most brilliant human I had ever met. The purpose of the interview was ambiguous. Our hosts thought we might be able to help the young man find an appropriate university in America. We left it at that.

Later that year, I received a letter from Emil, asking if I could help him get into one of the great universities in America.

I replied that I would do what I could, and that I needed copies of transcripts, SAT scores, and letters of recommendation. He sent them immediately.

I made 25 copies of his materials and sent them to every Ivy and near-Ivy League school in America. I assured them the boy was penniless, and to bring him here they would need to provide not only full tuition, room and board, but every possible expenditure, including air fare to America. I received replies from 19 of them, all telling me that they simply had no funds or no category to fit the young Bulgarian. Disappointed, I assumed that was the end of the quest.

Not quite!

Late in December 1994, I received a Christmas card from Pasadena, California. It was the young Bulgarian scholar. The professors at the California Institute of Technology are pretty good, he affirmed.

January 17, 2000

Crash Course

I confess I have taken a pretty cavalier approach to ice and have given it little thought. I certainly did little to "watch out." But now I know better, and this is the season for ice. A word of caution.

Except for the death of my mother's father, my first experience with mortality was the day I learned that one of my second-grade classmates had been killed on the ice the night before. She was singing Christmas carols on the concrete church steps with her Sunday school class when another child pushed her. Her head hit the corner of a step, and she was gone.

Except for the five times I have backed into stationary objects, I have caused only one very minor traffic accident. I was 15 at the time. The woman whose black Lincoln I scraped, by the way, was the wife of the editor of the Topeka Daily Capital, the state newspaper for Kansas.

But I confess that ice has given me and my family more thrills than I ever hoped for.

I thought I had taken all three of my children up to the parking lot of Buckhannon-Upshur High School to teach them how to spin a car on the ice. Peter denies that I ever took him, but he confesses that he practiced it aplenty when I wasn't watching.

That's one of those things a father doesn't want to know until years later.

Peter's only traffic accident was caused by ice. It wasn't his fault, but a car skidded down a hill and crashed into his Buick about 10 years ago. I am certain this minor accident was a good learning experience for my then-20-something son.

As far as I know, Jennifer's driving record contains no traffic accidents, but she once turned a perfect "doughnut" at the corner of Interstate 79 and U.S. 50 in Clarksburg as we returned from a winter vacation in Kansas. Ice!

Judy's favorite ice story gives us all the shudders. Coming home from her night school class in Morgantown one very wintry evening, she hit a sheet of ice just below the West Virginia University fieldhouse and careened all the way down to the Star City traffic light at the bottom of the hill.

Spinning out of control in the left lane, she saw her life pass before her.

Fortunately, the few other cars on the road that night got out of her way, and she made it home without denting a fender. For some reason, she expected me to be sitting up, worried to death about her welfare on that stormy night, but she found me snoring soundly in our cozy little bed.

I am pretty sure that I was a traffic cop in an earlier life, for several times I have taken control of difficult traffic.

Coming home one Saturday afternoon from Morgantown after Jennifer's ballet lesson, traffic came to a complete standstill on a sheet of ice. I could see about 100 cars jammed up on the hill before me, and the two of us got out and walked to the top of the hill. There we found the culprits: two or three immobile cars spinning their wheels to no avail.

Jen and I pushed one of the cars over onto the rocky median shoulder, then we pushed another. I think we pushed four or five more vehicles before another soul joined to help us.

A state policeman stopped in the northbound lane and came over to thank us, but said he had been pushing cars for an hour and was too exhausted to help! Eventually we got the entire hill full of traffic moving, and we made it home without further incident.

Driving west on Interstate 64 in eastern Kentucky one Thanksgiving vacation, I watched as an eastbound red pickup truck did a perfect doughnut before bouncing into the guardrail of a bridge at the bottom of a hill. The pickup survived that crash and continued up the next hill, but the incident gave me the warning I needed. I slowed to a creep as I approached the bridge at the bottom of my westbound lane.

And we saw two cars piled up, one atop the other, in the median just below the far side of the bridge.

We pulled over to the right, and I ran back to check. The bottom car was empty, but the top car still contained a mother and daughter, both in a state of shock. Just then a big, new, white Cadillac spun out of control on the ice-covered bridge and came off perpendicular to the highway. That Cadillac bounced like a football, over and over, with two elderly passengers thrashing in the front seat. While Judy ran to check on those two, I rushed back east and began to stop - and caution - all oncoming traffic. Eventually I found a nurse and an EMT worker in the westbound traffic, but it took an hour for a trooper to arrive. For that hour I was the policeman.

Judy and I survived one head-on collision. I was the passenger in the front right seat, and Judy was in the back seat. A car slid out of control directly head-on into the car in which we were riding. Everything was in slow motion, and we sat helpless as we watched it happen.

The good thing was that before the accident Judy had a kink in her neck, and when she leaned forward to watch us crash, her head slammed into the headrest of the front seat. That bloodied her nose, but two days later I noticed that the kink was gone. Seat belts saved us, by the way.

So except for my five very minor backward crashes, almost all of our driving excitement has been on the ice. Anyway, watch out for the ice!

January 28, 2000

What Would Jesus Do?

Where does the ripple stop when you toss a pebble into the pond? In this case, we start with a pebble thrown into the pond at Topeka, Kansas, and the ripple just won't seem to stop.

Today I see kids wearing bracelets marked "WWJD." What would Jesus do? I must confess that while this is a sweet question, the answer is probably not always as simple as most of those kids probably assume. I see these letters spray-painted as graffiti on walls and fences. One of my irreverent colleagues recently wore a bracelet with the letters "WWMSD," and when I asked, he said, "What would Martha Stewart do?"

The letters are ubiquitous today, and Martha Stewart aside, they raise a very good question. What those kids who wear the letters don't know, I imagine, is the origin of the question. The origin of these letters is that pebble in the pond.

The Rev. Charles M. Sheldon, minister of the First Congregational Church in Topeka, preached in that city in the closing years of the 19th century. First Church was one of those high-class churches where mink stoles and double-breasted suits were standard attire on Sunday morning, and where blue-collar families felt the cold shoulder of Kansas blueblood snobbery.

Rev. Sheldon was a man with a mission. He preached in a wealthy church, but he devoted much of his time to the less fortunate of this Midwestern city. He found his way into the "colored" neighborhood on Lane Street not far from his church, a section known as Tennessee Town because so many former slaves moved there from Memphis and Nashville in the late 1870s.

Sheldon founded a kindergarten for the little kids and a soup kitchen for the homeless. He took a special interest in schools that served the children of T. Town, as it was known, and from time to time provided scholarships to the brightest children.

The minister tossed a bombshell into his well-to-do congregation when he preached a sermon titled, "In His Steps." It was in the form of a powerful story. It told of an unemployed and poorly dressed stranger in a city very much like Topeka who walked into a church of wealthy Protestants very much like the church whose pulpit he occupied. The stranger walked in at 11 a.m. on a Sunday, made his way to the front of the church and spoke to the congregation a frightening message. He told them that while he did not feel welcome in their church, Jesus was also poorly dressed and badly received by the wealthy publicans of his time. He said that while Jesus welcomed the poor and the downtrodden, this church which proclaims His name does just the opposite.

In 1896, Sheldon enlarged the sermon into a popular novel with an innovative subtitle, "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?" The book sold more than 8 million copies.

The sermon, and the book, had a powerful impact on the wealthy congregation. Members started to take an interest in social action, giving themselves to the less fortunate of their city. For his part, Sheldon took a special interest in a bright little boy who lived in T. Town, a child named Elisha Scott.

Sheldon assisted Scott with scholarships and a little pocket change. He guided him through college and then through law school at Washburn University in Topeka.

The pebble in the pond was expanding its ripple.

Scott became one of the most effective attorneys in eastern Kansas. He defended accused rapists and murderers whose only offense was the color of their skin. He worked for those who could pay him only with a heartfelt "thanks." His reputation grew as his practice expanded. Mail came to him addressed only as "Colored Lawyer, Topeka." In 1930 he ran for state office, and though he didn't win, he polled more than 45,000 votes in his quest to become America's first African-American attorney general. Three of Scott's sons attended the Washburn University law school, two of them joining him in his Topeka practice.

When the African-American community in South Park, a suburb of Kansas City, brought suit against the board of education for excluding Negro children from the new junior high school, they hired Elisha Scott to guide the case. They won their suit, and the South Park school was integrated in 1950. The ripple expanded.

When Elisha Scott's sons, John and Charles, returned from the war in 1945, they brought a new challenge to the complacent leadership of the Topeka NAACP. They were unwilling to live according to the old rules of segregation. They started writing to Thurgood Marshall at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, laying the plan to challenge segregation in the public schools.

Marshall and his colleagues back east decided that Topeka should be included, along with other school segregation cases in Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, in a collection of challenges which might prove that segregation in the public schools is, in itself, a violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Thus it was that the Rev. Oliver Brown and 12 other parents were persuaded to take their children to a variety of white schools in Topeka in September 1950, to be rejected on the basis of their race, that they might challenge segregation where it counted most.

That suit, brought to the Federal District Court in Topeka in 1951, became known as *Brown v. Board of Education*. And the attorneys who brought the suit were the children of a man whose career was guided by the Congregational minister who first penned those words, What would Jesus do?

February 7, 2000

There is a Season

I Imagine that every fifth-grade child in America knows that the Rev. Oliver L. Brown, assistant pastor of St. Mark's AME Church in Topeka, Kansas, took his little girl Linda Carol to be enrolled in elementary school and was told that she could not attend because of the color of her skin. Because the NAACP took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, life in America will never be the same. The year was 1950, half a century ago.

What those fifth-grade children probably do not know is that Linda Carol Brown was one of 20 African-American children whose 13 parents tried to enroll them in white schools in Topeka that year. Apparently by chance, a secretary at the NAACP office in Topeka typed the Brown name first, and that typist thereby named the case.

What those fifth-grade children also do not know is that this famous case, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, was actually a cluster of cases including school segregation in South Carolina, Delaware, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The case is so named because the Topeka case happened to be first to arrive on the docket at the Supreme Court.

What those fifth-grade children do not know is that in the Topeka case, the Board of Education simply did not show up at the Supreme Court.

Topeka is my hometown. I entered the ninth grade at Holliday Junior High School the same day Linda and her father tried to enter Sumner Elementary School. I graduated from Topeka High School the same week the Supreme Court ruled that "separate" education is not "equal." For many years, the story has been close to my heart. I have stood on the spot where Linda lived. I have followed the same railroad tracks where she walked each day, and I have stood at the corner where she waited for the bus. There is more to tell.

The school that refused Linda admission was named for Charles Sumner, one of America's foremost abolitionists and a member of President Lincoln's Cabinet.

Most people of Topeka took very little interest in the case. Certainly, I knew nothing of it until it was over. Many members of the African-American community did not want to rock the boat and thought the NAACP caused trouble. The three-judge panel that first heard the case in Topeka on June 25, 1951, agreed with the NAACP that segregation is harmful to black children, but ruled that they had no authority to overturn the 1896 Supreme Court ruling, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which established the separate but equal racial principle.

The Topeka Daily Capital, state newspaper for Kansas, gave the story a small, front-page headline halfway down column two.

Nothing was said on the editorial page when the board won the first round. Nothing at all! Topeka didn't much care one way or another, but not many Topekans were very proud that we segregated children in school.

The famed Board of Education was made up of six prominent and unpaid Topeka citizens elected for four-year, staggered terms. In 1951, the six were considered puppets of a very strong and popular superintendent, Dr. Kenneth McFarland.

But the Daily Capital turned up some financial mismanagement on McFarland's part and published a devastating story.

On April 3, 1951, seven months after the principal at Sumner School turned Linda Carol Brown away, Topeka voted to remove three board members loyal to McFarland and replace them with three considered "liberal" and all opponents of the superintendent.

On April 5, McFarland submitted his resignation.

As every fifth-grader knows, the NAACP appealed the case to America's highest court. What those children do not know is that the new school board wanted nothing to do with the case. When one of the "loyal" board members moved to fight the case in the Supreme Court, the motion was rejected 3-2, with one abstention.

Because the NAACP charged that an 1879 Kansas law allowing school segregation was unconstitutional, the three-judge panel asked the state of Kansas to represent itself in the case. So the state of Kansas sent Paul E. Wilson, assistant attorney general, to defend against the NAACP charge.

Because Wilson's boss, Attorney General Edward Fatzer, had higher political aspirations and personally disagreed with school segregation, he chose to keep himself out of the unpopular case. He assigned his young and inexperienced assistant to handle it. Wilson was new on the job. He had never handled an appeal. Wilson didn't even have an appropriate suit to wear before the Hall of Justice. His best suit was a tan, gabardine affair, and he had to put \$5 down on a new blue suit at the Palace Clothing Co. in Topeka before he could leave for Washington.

Dressed in his new blue suit, Wilson rode the Santa Fe Chief to Chicago and caught the Baltimore and Ohio to Washington, where he would try the first appellate case of his career. But he rode the train alone. He represented the state of Kansas, but not the Board of Education.

The Topeka school board abandoned the case and began sending African-American children to formerly white schools in 1953, one year before the court handed down its monumental decision.

On May 18, 1954, the day after the Supreme Court ruled that separate education violates the "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment, an editorial in the Topeka Daily Capital said, in essence, "It's about time." And Wilson, the attorney who represented his state in the famous case, published a book in 1995 titled, "A Time to Lose."

"To every thing," reads Ecclesiastes, "there is a season ... a time to get and a time to lose."

There is indeed.

February 14, 2000

No Place To Hide

We require the seniors in our department to write final papers before they graduate, and they are allowed to choose any topic that seems to be somehow related to sociology. Besides the formal paper, these days my students have to make an oral Power Point presentation before their peers and their teacher. I encourage them to choose topics close to their hearts, and as much as possible, something they know a lot about.

I always start by telling them some of the reports given in the past.

Greg Godwin joined the Marines shortly after high school, and soon after he came back to college here in Buckhannon, he announced that he would be a candidate for the local school board. He benefited from the fact that his father had held that office before him, and he shook a lot of hands. He won. His senior paper reported on the racial desegregation of the schools in Upshur County. Today Greg is a United Methodist pastor here in West Virginia.

Tom Bickerton did a community study of the little town of Adrian, where as a student pastor he served the United Methodist Church. Today, Tom is a district superintendent in the West Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

One student began her report by asking me to read out loud a handwritten letter addressed to her. The letter was written by her grandfather, absolving her for helping him purchase a rifle at the local hardware store. By the time she received the letter, he had put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

She wrote on the topic of geriatric suicide. That report hit home with me because one older member of our extended family had recently jumped from a bridge.

Another student named Connie planned to make a career working with older people, and she wrote a fine paper on geriatric sex. "Use it or lose it," she reported.

The papers this year were all centered on family life, on boyfriends/girlfriends, on living together before marriage, etc. Marcie reported on growing up in a broken family. Wes reported that children whose mothers work outside the home seem to do just as well as those whose mothers stay at home. Aimie reported that girls who live with their boyfriends suffer more physical abuse than married women, and that while most girls move in with matrimony in mind, the boys more often do it for convenience and walk out the day after graduation.

Sherron wanted to know if a person's religion has any influence on sexual behavior before marriage. Her hypothesis was that conservatives were better behaved than liberals, but her research failed to support that premise.

Kathy spent a semester of her junior year living in India and working with a women's health clinic. Based on her own work and on interviews with her clients, she reported on women with AIDS.

Katie wrote her report on the social symptoms and consequences of dyslexia. Katie's father and one brother are dyslexic, and her mother has had to struggle with a near-dysfunctional marriage plagued with the many symptoms so painful to that condition. She used family photographs in her Power Point lecture.

Angie told us what it was like to grow up black in white Buckhannon. Daughter of a white mother and an African-American father in this pristine white community, she spent a lot of time telling herself and her friends that she was just a little more brown. She finally discovered what Frantz Fanon called her "Negritude" when she spent a summer with her paternal grandparents.

Several students discussed the role of women in contemporary society, reporting that the "glass ceiling" is very much alive and well.

Quintina interviewed a lot of working couples to determine why wives do more chores around the house when both partners come home exhausted after work.

She concluded that women do about 75 percent of the housework, that most men are both lazy and selfish, and that wives who let their husbands get away with it are just suckers. Ouch!

I asked Quintina how she got that name, by the way, and she said it was because she was the fifth grandchild on both sides of the family.

The classroom is one of those frightening places where nobody gets to hide. I witness my students' joys and their pains. I catch them when they cheat, and their plagiarisms stick out like sore thumbs. I congratulate them when they win a game and suffer with them when they lose. I excuse them for the funerals they must attend and see the tear in an eye when the boyfriend just walked out. "Men suck," Patty used to tell me. I know who's working hard and who is hardly working.

But most of all, they see me. I stand before each class of students for about 40 hours each semester. They know only too well when I am not prepared, and also when I seem to know what I am talking about. There is no place to hide in the classroom. This is no place for sissies.

This September, I will begin my fourth decade of teaching at West Virginia Wesleyan College. It has been a good life.

July 22, 2000

Peanuts Gallery

Cartoonist Charles Schulz is dead, but Lucy Van Pelt will live as long as there are little girls.

Jacqueline Michelle Warner is a major character in the Warner family cartoon. Until a few days ago, Jackie lived in Cincinnati with her mother, her father, and her little brother, Mitchell. Judy and I spent a few days in Cincinnati this summer helping with the family because her father is starting a new job in Philadelphia, her mother gave her a new baby brother on June 5, and the movers were coming on the 12th.

Peter and I took Jackie and Mitchell to a Reds game one Saturday evening before the baby came. We ate supper at the game. Hot dogs, Cracker Jacks, and peanuts. Jackie's kind of meal. She loved the fireworks display after Barry Larkin hit a home run. She voted for the All-Star players using the little punch cards they handed out in the third inning. That took two innings.

I'm pretty sure Jackie never noticed the big green grass field down at the bottom of the stadium, let alone the fellows in white and gray uniforms running around, until the little red men came running out after the fifth inning to sweep the bases and smooth the infield. She likes the little men in red.

But the real action was in the stands. We asked her on the way home what her favorite part of the game was. The wave, of course! She spent half an inning watching the wave move around the stadium and throwing her arms up as it came past our section. Jackie and Mitchell gave out at the end of the fifth inning, but we kept them occupied until they could sing "Take me out to the ballgame," and then it was time for bed. The fellows in front of us were happy when we left because Jackie could not kick them anymore.

Baby brother was named Nicholas Alden Warner, by the way. That name is just a bit snooty, because Judy claims she can trace her ancestry back to John Alden of Mayflower fame.

Speak for yourself, John Alden. I assure Peter that we've got some famous folks on our side of the line as well. My grandparents on both sides were hog farmers in Kansas, but we all go back to Adam and Eve!

We all went out to eat one evening at our favorite restaurant down on the Ohio River. It's called the Barleycorn, and it's on a floating barge. I took Jackie and Mitchell all around the ship while we waited on supper, and we watched the Mallards and the little ducklings swimming around the boat.

I told them that their father's favorite childhood story was about a Mallard family who lived in Boston.

Jackie's favorite part of the meal was standing under the table and throwing her french fries to the Mallards. That was kind of exciting because some great fish, leviathans actually, swim just beneath the surface, and they usually steal the french fries before the ducks can grab them. Whoosh!

As we drove home after the Barleycorn, Jackie got pretty mad at all of us because our adult conversation was not allowing her to tell us a story. She got our attention by shouting so loudly in the car that we couldn't hear ourselves think. She scolded us for not letting her talk, and when we offered her a chance, she informed us that now she wouldn't tell us. We would just have to suffer. "What's the point, huh?" she scolded with her very loud voice. O Heavens, that's what I say when I scold!

Jackie's favorite form of dress is running around the house naked, but from time to time she is forced to don her Barbie underpants. She owns some sparkling silver tennis shoes, probably the kind Cinderella wore to the ball. I asked her if she was a princess when she wore those lovely shoes, and she informed me that she is a princess all the time! Excuse me. Her favorite CD-ROM is Barbie as Sleeping Beauty. I have to help her put the disk into the computer, but she can take it from there. She and Mitchell are both very fine artists, and their handiwork decorates our refrigerator.

Bishop Ives appointed a new minister, Mark Flynn, to serve our United Methodist church here in Buckhannon, and we took Jackie and Mitchell to the reception for Mark and for his fiancée, Judy, the other evening. Helen Sheppard asked Jackie how old she was, and quite smartly she held up four fingers. She also told Mrs. Sheppard that Mitchell was only two. Helen asked Jackie how old she thought she was, and Jackie told her "20." That was not a compliment, but Helen was pleased. She then asked how old she thought her grandfather was. Jackie had to do some quick math in her head, but finally replied, "very old."

"How old is that?" Helen asked.

She calculated her figures one more time.

"The last number," Jackie replied.

So there you have it.

Charles Schulz is dead, but Lucy Van Pelt will live on as long as there are little girls in the world. Thank heaven!

October 4, 2000

Capital Punishment

I'm meditating on that federal execution in Terre Haute, Indiana, on June 11, trying to make sense of what has happened and what we are doing. I think all of us are trying to make sense out of a bizarre and senseless moment six years ago in Oklahoma City, as well as the bizarre ritual in Terre Haute.

I remain firm in my opposition to capital punishment. At the same time, I can truthfully say my guts gave a sigh of relief and even satisfaction when I heard the words saying Timothy McVeigh was dead. He got what he deserved. "Yes," my guts sputtered. If we must have a death penalty, this man should be the first to die.

I oppose an execution of any kind. And yet I have no sense that what we did in Terre Haute was in any way sacrilegious. I have no feeling that if we seriously asked the question, "What would Jesus do?" we would have saved the life of this really evil man. I guess I can say that Jesus would not have pulled the lever on the man who killed so many innocent people in Oklahoma City. But then I can also say that Jesus would not have paved our highways or invented the telephone.

I'm thinking of the thousands of individuals whose lives were changed on April 19, 1995. Changed forever. Some lives were shattered. Children who lost a mother or a father. Parents who lost a child.

Women and men who lost husbands and wives. Those injured. Those mutilated who did not die. Those who lost a friend. Not to mention, of course, the 168 women, men and children who lost everything. I'm thinking of those who died quickly, but also of those crushed in the rubble who died slowly, in great pain, cold and alone and without water.

I'm not thinking that we, as a nation, did something evil when we executed this man. I'm not thinking that those surviving victims of the Murrah Federal Building blast did anything wrong by wishing for the death of this man, nor was there anything wrong in that deep sense of satisfaction they felt when they heard that he was dead.

I oppose capital punishment, but I am not here to shake a finger. I know, as all who study crime must know, that killing a killer does not take a bite out of crime. We no longer kill the killers with any sense that this will make the world a safer place in which to live. No, that idea vanished long ago. Killing killers does not "work" in that sense.

But sometimes, as in the present case, killing the killer gives us a very great sense of satisfaction that justice has been done. Not that this will prevent some other kook from trying the same thing on another day. I doubt that anyone who wanted McVeigh dead ever thought such a thought. No, this was not a rational act intended to save some future lives.

It is just the thought, or perhaps just the feeling, that the moral structure of the universe is somehow - in some small way - set back in order. Yes. That is why we do it. That is why we want to kill a killer. That is why we suffer through this bizarre ritual in Terre Haute. That is why we have this very great sense of satisfaction when we hear that he is dead.

I am not trying to say that the moral structure of the universe is in fact set back in order. I am just reporting that this seems to be a sentiment held at a very deep level by a great many thoughtful and good people.

But not by all, of course.

We live in a democracy, so the sentiments of the people count. For more than three decades now, most of us who live in this very fine nation have reported that we support the death penalty for certain criminals. Men more than women. Republicans more than Democrats. Rich more than poor. Whites more than African-Americans. But even so, women and Democrats and African-Americans and the poor have in fact voiced their assent for killing killers.

We have this word "deserve" in our vocabulary, and we think about it a lot.

We judge others by what they deserve.

One man deserves wealth and another deserves to beg on the street. One baseball team deserves to win the pennant, another deserves the cellar. One good turn deserves another. A child deserves a spanking. A thief deserves a jail cell. A killer deserves to die.

What's good for the goose is good for the gander. Fair is fair, we say. McVeigh deserves potassium chloride. I oppose capital punishment, but I cannot say that McVeigh did not deserve potassium chloride. If the word "deserve" has any meaning at all, that man deserved what he got. And more!

Nor do I think we did anything "cruel and unusual." Unusual, yes, because what he did was also unusual. But not cruel in any physical sense of the word. Most of us have felt the prick of a needle and have gone to sleep on a gurney. That is not a cruel experience. Of the many possible ways to die, this is one of the best. It is not cruel.

Then why do I oppose this ritual of death? For one thing, because we make mistakes. The state of Oklahoma recently executed Mark Andrew Fowler, Malcolm Rent Johnson, and Loyd Winford LaFevers, all accused of murder. We know now that they were not guilty of the crimes for which they were executed. They were convicted and sent to their death by an overzealous so-called "forensic scientist." The list of mistakes is very long, including many made in West Virginia. Thank goodness we do not execute here.

But I also oppose this ritual because I believe it is wrong, and I would oppose it even if we never made mistakes. And I cannot explain this feeling. I wish I were of a single mind, but I am not.

June 18, 2001

True Citizens of the World

Judy and I disappeared from civilization on the weekend of June 22-24. We retreated into the forests of the Blue Ridge Mountains, into a YMCA camp near Asheville, North Carolina, where Judy's Woodstock Alumni association held its annual confab.

Judy isn't like the rest of us. She grew up in a world completely foreign to what you or I know. Her parents were missionaries to India, commissioned by the Methodist Church in 1934. When she turned school age, they boarded her on a train with two older sisters and sent them off into the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains to attend a British-type boarding school by the gentle name of Woodstock. That school, they say, took its name from one of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels and was first opened for English-speaking children in 1854.

At least three other West Virginians grew up at Woodstock: Jim White, Becky Peters, and Joe Mow.

Although sending your children to an English boarding school seems pretty harsh to us today, it was just the thing to do for all professional and upper-class Anglican parents. India was a British colony until 1947, and there was simply no alternative for missionary parents.

Strictly speaking, the school was not part of the British system, although it served that system and was much like it.

It was an independent school governed by a very severe group of fundamentalist so-called Christians. It mostly served the children of American families in India: military families, university professors, New York Times reporters' families, missionaries, all American families who for whatever reason found themselves posted to the Indian subcontinent. It even educated some of the children of royal families of Southeast Asia, princes and princesses, for instance, from Nepal, at least one of whom was murdered in the palace slaughter earlier this summer.

The Dalai Lama visited and spoke to the school not so long ago.

Alums all belong to the Woodstock Old Students Association, or WOSA for short. They meet every summer to renew old friendships and to keep up with the school. About 10 years ago Judy and I were proud to serve as hostess and host to the WOSA annual meeting held on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College. Next year the meeting will be in Vancouver.

But this year we gathered in the beautiful YMCA camp near Asheville.

As you can imagine, these are not ordinary people. Their experiences, growing up as American or European children in a land foreign to themselves, has made them quite an unusual lot. For starters, can you imagine a high school alumni reunion where alcohol is not served? I am also certain that the percentage of these alums who attend college or obtain a graduate degree is about 30-times higher than that of the average group of high school alums.

They listen to public radio and read national newspapers. They talk about international events on their e-mail list-serve.

I am pretty sure the program for most high school reunions includes an afternoon of golf and an evening of drunken dancing. Not this group. The program in the Blue Ridge Mountains included a lecture and slide show presented by a professor of anthropology at Emory University, a Woodstock alumna, of course, whose special research topic is a female Sufi healing practice in southern India. There was also a lecture by a Duke University political scientist whose specialty is ecology and soil conservation in the Rajput agricultural villages of northern India. For entertainment on Saturday evening, we listened to live Indian music, ragas, the sounds of sitar and tabala, and a precocious little girl dancing to traditional Indian music. Tica tica tum.

But the real reason for the reunion is the gathering of old friends and the renewing of childhood ties. Severed from family life for nine months of the year, these WOSA alums became closer than brothers and sisters.

The bonds of affection are overwhelming.

Earlier I said the school was governed by a group of fundamentalist Christians. It was more the Jonathan Edwards brand of Christianity: "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." This provided a rough life for children torn from the security of loving families.

I must add here that by the time they got into high school - in the 1950s - a new and wonderful open-minded breed of teacher came to their aid, but it was a little late.

Judy's piano teacher sat beside her with a ruler poised over her fingers to crack the knuckles every time she missed a note. The children spent most of their day in total military silence and were punished for speaking. They could not even retreat to nurturing parents at the end of the day. Yet their loyalty to Woodstock is very great, and I think only a few would trade their childhood experience for what most of us grew up with. One called their school "a bit of heaven on earth."

So they learned to love one another, to rely on each other and to become a family of children without parents. And yet, in spite of wall-to-wall cruelty, or perhaps because of it, I will have to confess that most of the children turned out pretty well.

They hold a global consciousness beyond compare. They learned the meaning of "tolerance" because they came from so many varied backgrounds and could not hide themselves in the limiting prejudices with which most of us grow up. That - in spite of some extremely narrow-minded teachers and dorm matrons.

Because they all came "home" to America from time to time, they saw their motherland from the outside more than from within.

The paralyzing constrictions of ethnocentrism, extreme nationalism, and a fundamentalist brand of religion with which so many people grow up - here and everywhere - were simply not options for the children at Woodstock.

The whole world - the entire planet - was their home.

During the worship service held in the YMCA chapel on Sunday morning, a Woodstock alum well past the age of retirement preached a youthful sermon for the 21st Century. He called it a "Theology of Ecology." The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And for our hymn we sang "This is My Song." Those of you who know the words also know that it is a song of internationalism, a recognition that there are other cultures and, frankly, other religions than our own.

Although years ago their fundamentalist teachers tried their best to limit the children's perspectives and to convince them that one had to become a white Alabama Baptist in order to be "saved" and go to heaven, the children never bought into that line of demagoguery. They rejected what they knew to be a false doctrine, and in spite of those inward-looking teachers, these children learned because they saw for themselves that if there is a God, He cannot possibly be the hateful ruler they heard about in required chapel. That God could not possibly be the one who threatened to send them to Hell if they did not adopt the line their teachers fed them.

They saw the whole world for themselves, and they knew very well that the Supreme Ruler of the Universe holds "the whole world in his hands." From their home among the foothills they looked up into the snows of the Himalayan Mountains. They saw for themselves the power of Creation and the impossibility of a God too small.

Ten years ago, when the reunion was held in Buckhannon, we heard two speakers describe a term with which all WOSA alums could identify. The speakers introduced the term "third-culture kids," those children who grow up in a foreign land.

They grow up in a culture which they know is not their own, while at the same time never have the opportunity to learn their own culture. They are not part of the host nation. Yet when they return to America or wherever, they are not part of that culture either, because they simply did not grow up there.

They feel a deep and painful sense of alienation.

But painful as it may be, this sense of being a "third-culture kid" may just be their saving grace. It is this sense of not belonging to any integrated culture that makes them feel they are citizens of the whole world. And perhaps that is a feeling we must all experience before we learn to appreciate the planet onto which we were born, and the God who holds it in His hands.

July 23, 2001

Across the Swinging Bridge

I stood on an Appalachian hillside overlooking a white farmhouse and three or four outbuildings. A quiet breeze sang a soft melody as it moved through the boughs of the arbor vita and juniper trees. Below, the Left Fork of the Holly River cut its path through the mountains of Hacker Valley.

This was not my first visit to the farm on the Left Fork of the Holly River.

Brenda had invited Judy and me and some of her classmates out to visit her grandparents' farm about 10 years ago when she was a student of mine, and we met her aunt who makes baskets for craft shows around the state.

We had to park then, as now, beside the barn on the other side of the fork and walk across the swinging bridge. I still have a photo of some of those kids laughing as they crossed the bridge, trying to catch their balance while holding on to the steel cable from which it hung.

I was not surprised that an old friend of the family sang "Amazing Grace" from the hillside graveyard, sang as she stood in the shade of the arbor vita tree.

Brenda's sister handed out copies of Brenda's handwritten version of America's favorite hymn, penned with artistic letters that seemed to express her own special understanding of a song that pronounced that grace had saved a "wretch like me."

Each of us was asked to tell a memory of her.

I told of that day 10 years ago when we first visited the farm, but also of the Saturday evening a year ago when I saw Brenda again outside the college chapel. I did not know that she had married a new colleague of mine, and that she would soon be moving to Buckhannon with their little boy. She gave me a hug, and my heart was warmed to know that she was once again a part of the Wesleyan family.

We all laughed as Brenda's cousin told on her, told how the two of them used to skinny-dip late at night in the "blue hole" of the Left Fork of the Holly River, a hole so deep none of the kids could ever touch the bottom. Brenda and her cousin once coaxed their mothers, two sisters, to skinny with them, and then the girls shined a flashlight on the two older naked bodies.

That tickled me because we had also been asked to bring a flower to plant, and after considering black-eyed Susans, I decided to take a spadeful of naked lady bulbs from my back yard. I chose the naked ladies, flowers my cousin insists should be called "magic lilies," because the name is so funny and it just seemed right because Brenda was forever laughing and teasing us all. I said, as I named my gift, that after the skinny-dip story I realized all the more how appropriate my flowers would be, blooming in all their nakedness from the windblown cemetery halfway up that Appalachian mountain. Her sister said I didn't know the half of it. Perhaps that's best.

We gathered there on that warm August Saturday morning because a drunken driver turned a corner too fast at an intersection in Morgantown last autumn, and it is no longer the case that Brenda is part of the Wesleyan family.

August 31, 2001

America and Palestinians

I was disturbed when I saw the latest opinion poll taken in Israel early in December. Some 71 percent of Israeli citizens now support a "massive military assault" on Palestine. The nail will soon be driven into the casket, and frankly, that will be a great tragedy. But it will not be accidental. It is all part of an Israeli game plan that had its origin at least as early as autumn in 1967. And we in the United States have been suckered right into the game.

According to the CIA Fact Book, as of 2000, Israel had built more than 300 "settlements" in the "Occupied Territories" - land belonging to the Palestinians. They include 231 in the West Bank, 29 in East Jerusalem, 24 in the Gaza Strip, and 42 in the Golan Heights. By the turn of the millennium, Israel had located more than 370,000 Israeli citizens in lands belonging to the Palestinians. Of the 1.5 million acres of Palestinian land, Israel has confiscated 750,000 acres to be used for her precious "settlements." And with American money and American military support, we have helped it happen.

To make matters worse, besides driving Palestinians off their own land in order to build more "settlements," Israeli bulldozers have razed more than 2,000 Palestinian homes in Palestine because, they say, they did not meet Israeli building code standards. This whole thing has irritated the Palestinians.

And from the beginning, although the United Nations and the United States have requested and demanded that Israel stop this outrageous behavior, our words have fallen on deaf ears.

What does this have to do with the price of eggs in China? Everything!

It is why they hate us. That is why Palestinian boys join organizations with names like Amal and Hamas and Hizbollah and Jihad and PLO and Black September and PFLP and al-Qaida. That is why Palestinian children throw stones at Israeli soldiers, soldiers occupying and protecting Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands.

That is why these young men choose to fasten bombs beneath their shirts and climb onto crowded buses or pull the pin on a crowded street.

And on September 11, some Arab men attracted our attention with an attack on New York City and our nation's capital.

But strange as this may seem, it's all part of the game created by the masterminds who shape Israeli policy: Do something so completely outrageous that the radical elements in Palestine and the Middle East will turn to violence and acts of terror. Then we can drive them off their land, and the world won't stop us. That time has come.

This is all a big trick, and we in the USA have been suckered into the game plan just as much as those mad bombers. As outrageous as those 334 "settlements" may be, they don't grab our attention. Who has ever seen a newspaper headline with the words, "Israel builds more settlements"?

But let one enraged Palestinian boy strap a bomb to his belly and pull the pin, and we hear about it on the evening news or we read about it in the headlines of every city newspaper in America. That enraged Palestinian boy is actually and unwittingly a pawn of Israeli policy.

Now on every street corner in America and in every coffee shop across this land, the people are whispering: We've got to do something about those terrorists. And the Bush administration announces that Israel has every right to defend herself against terror - a phenomenon on which we have just ourselves declared war.

I attended the "Third World Studies" conference in Omaha in October, just weeks after September 11. Third World! We're talking Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, etc. Conference leaders reorganized the agenda to focus on "America's New War."

In trying to explain this new world in which we live, the keynote speaker, an American expert on Afghanistan, told us the people in the Middle East say, "Americans just don't get it."

After his address, I asked our speaker - a man who has spent most of his adult life in Afghanistan, first with the Peace Corps and later with the U.S. State Department - what we "don't get." "Israel," he replied. Well, I knew in advance what he would say, but I needed to hear it from his own lips.

So what does "Israel" have to do with the World Trade Center? Everything! It is the USA that supports and protects the little nation of Israel. With courtesy and fine diplomatic words, we have asked Menachem Begin, Golda Meir, Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu, Yitzhak Shamir, Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, etc., not to build those apartment buildings, those swimming pools and those shopping malls in Palestinian lands. We have kindly asked Israel to take away her bulldozers, her carpenters, her engineers, her plumbers, her soldiers, and her tanks, but she won't listen, and we won't make her listen.

This thing started just a few weeks after the Six Day War in June 1967. Before the end of 1968, Israel had built villages with names such as Argaman, Kalya, Kfar Etzion, and Mehola in a land she euphemistically calls the "Occupied Territories." In 1969 she added Rosh Zurim.

But this policy has at all times violated international law. The Geneva Convention says: "The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into territories it occupies" (Article 49, Paragraph 6). Not to worry. The United Nations never will make war against Israel.

So now with anger at the boiling point, those Palestinian boys, fedayeen, pull the pin beneath their shirts and explode themselves and their nails and shrapnel into the faces of Israeli children and teen-agers, and Israeli citizens say: "Let's wipe them off the face of the globe." And soon those lands the United Nations awarded to Palestine will be completely empty of Palestinians, and Israel will have achieved the purpose of her neat little game. Are we going to be a part of that?

December 12, 2001

God Willing

I was walking down a stairway in Boston University when a friend told me Kennedy had been shot. I stood at the front of a classroom in Emporia, Kansas, when a student told me Martin Luther King had been shot. Our family was camping in Mesa Verde, California, in the summer of 1968 when we overheard on the car radio nearby that Robert Kennedy had been shot.

But each of those memories is of a news report, the discovery after the fact, that our nation suffered a tragedy and that our national history would take a major change of course. For me and for many others, the experience of September 11 was not the same.

I walked into the little kiosk called "Sunny Bucks" on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College to purchase my morning paper when I saw three students glued to a television set. A plane has just crashed into the World Trade Center, they whispered as I joined them to watch.

A few minutes later I walked up the hill to the college library where I could view the scene again on a different TV, and I joined three colleagues all holding their morning cup of coffee and speaking in soft voices. There before our very eyes, the events of that terrible day continued to unfold. We saw the second plane appear on the edge of the screen, now coming closer and closer to the second tower, and there as we stared in total shock we watched the second crash.

I lose all consciousness of time and sequence as I reconstruct those next fateful minutes and hours. I know I telephoned Judy in Philadelphia, baby-sitting grandchildren while Pete and Cindy ran a marathon in Bourdeau, France, and she was already watching.

I know I continued to watch and that I knew the firemen had entered the buildings, lots of them, before the whole thing collapsed. I know I watched those two enormous towers just evaporate in smoke and dust. Although it seemed impossible to believe - yet I knew it was so - I was witnessing the death and horror of thousands of people.

Millions of Americans were witness at that moment to another one of those fateful moments when a corner of world history is turned.

I was not able, a few days later, to hold back the tears that welled up in my eyes, nor did I want to, as Bette Midler sang in Yankee Stadium, "Did you ever know you are my hero?" or as Liza Minnelli sang "New York, New York."

I hummed along - and prayed along - with silent lips as Lee Greenwood gave us one more time, but this time in that same stadium, his now near-sacred song, "God Bless the USA."

Our music has guided us through these days. We have all listened and fought back more tears as several choirs have sung, "Mine eyes have seen the glory."

Except that now more than ever, we have examined those words.

So what does it mean that we have turned a corner in the history of the world? For surely this has happened. Except not in "passive voice." Now history is not "happening" - we are making it happen.

As several times before in the last 100 years, we who live here in this glorious land have joined our lives and our motivations to the task of reshaping the form of human civilization.

I once read that the Chinese word for "crisis" is translated, literally, as, "dangerous opportunity." That is where we are at this moment. We, as a people, are in the midst of such a dangerous opportunity. We will all work now to build a new world, a different kind of world than the one which died before our eyes on the 11th day of September, the Year of Our Lord 2001.

In the vocabulary of Islam, the term "in shallah" means "God willing" - as a good West Virginian says, "God willin' and the crick don't rise." A devout Muslim begins every future-tense sentence with the term "in shallah."

God willing, I will see you tomorrow. God willing, we will have steak on the grille tomorrow evening. God willing, we will meet again in Paradise.

I want to use that word for what I say next.

In shallah, we will build - together - a new world, a world where religious prejudice does not separate us from our brothers and our sisters.

In shallah, we will build a world where every human being has a chance to fulfill her or his dreams.

In shallah, we will build a world where Christians will not say to Muslims or Jews or Hindus: I have drawn a circle and I have drawn you out.

In shallah, we will build a world where people of all faiths will respect each other and will not try to convert each other to their particular brand of religious orientation - or bigotry.

In shallah, we will build a world where the kid will lie down beside the leopard, and the child will put its hand on the adder's den.

Yet in this season where loved ones gather and we tell our stories and say our prayers, as we join one another to build a new world, we must also live as families and show our children and our grandchildren how to live.

Our world has changed. That old world where most of us felt pretty safe has disappeared. It will never, in my lifetime or in yours, return.

My mother taught me to say this bedtime prayer. Your mother taught you the same. These words are very simple. They are also profound - a good prayer for this year when history turns a corner:

Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

In shallah, let us go now and build that new and better world. God bless the USA! And God bless the Muslims, and the Jews, and the Hindus, and the Sikhs, and the Christians, and all peoples, everywhere. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Or Ramadan.

Or Chanukah.

Or Kwanza.

Or Diwali.

December 24, 2001

One of the Great Scholars

As I write these words, Fred Peterson is sitting at his computer in the office next door. At just less than 82 years young, he is marking his last day on the job. Fred has spent the last couple of months carrying books, boxes, files, equipment, plastic human skulls, and Meso-American artifacts out to his car each evening as he goes home from work. Tomorrow his office will be vacant.

Fred has been a part of the landscape at West Virginia Wesleyan College for the past 38 years. Quietly he has reminded us, simply with his presence among us, that we are a pretty good college, and that, frankly, we are a pretty good faculty. His very presence tells us that.

Fred came to Wesleyan in 1964, six years before I arrived. He has been our anthropologist and archaeologist all of those years. In fact, Fred was the first full-time Professor of Anthropology and Archeology ever employed by a college or university to teach those subjects in West Virginia.

Fred was not quite a young man when he moved his books and his artifacts to West Virginia. He had already established himself as one of the world's finest archaeologists and certainly, within the profession, one of the most famous.

His book, *Ancient Mexico*, is a classic in the field. It is required reading for every field worker who ever turns the soil in the ancient ruins south of the border.

Fred was crew foreman for the great Tehuacan Valley expeditions in Mexico that unearthed the earliest corn in the Americas. The result of that work has been shown in the National Geographic specials.

Fred is not just a world-class academic. Growing up in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, he trained himself as a boy to become an expert archer. In fact, Fred won first place in statewide competition using his skill with a bow and arrow.

That expertise stood him in good stead in the U.S. Army when, during World War II, he was given a special clandestine assignment to shoot Nazis in the snow-covered mountains of Norway.

That assignment actually collapsed before it was carried out, although he went through the winter training and taught his group how to wear snowshoes.

As Allied troops advanced into Germany, Fred was made first sergeant of the 104th Medical Dispensary and later was given charge of 25,000 German prisoners-of-war. He was made sergeant major at the Supreme Headquarters of European Forces in Germany. He worked in offices beside such men as Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley, and he knew them by name as they knew him. Fred earned three Bronze Battle Stars.

Talk about the "Greatest Generation!"

Last October, Wesleyan awarded Dr. David Stuart an honorary doctorate of humane letters. Dr. Stuart was Fred Peterson's star pupil back in those early years at this college. In his luncheon address after receiving the award, Dr. Stuart told us all a bit of what it meant to him to study under Dr. Peterson, and how well that had prepared him to study for and earn a Ph.D. in archeology at the University of New Mexico.

Dr. Stuart is a world-renowned scholar on the Anasazi Indians of ancient New Mexico. As such he delivered the keynote address for the 100th anniversary of the Chaco Canyon National Monument - the major Anasazi archaeology site in America. America's most famed anthropology and archaeology scholars attended the ceremony. Peterson was among them.

Stuart told us: "I wasn't their main interest. The person they were most interested in talking to wasn't Dave Stuart. It was Fredrick A. Peterson. What some of you may not know is that Fred Peterson was already one of the most famous field archaeologists in the Americas when he came to Wesleyan."

So for the past 32 years I have worked beside one of the great scholars of America. I am proud of that.

May 13, 2002

Potemkin Villages

Suzanne Massie's book, "The Land of the Firebird," describes the arts and crafts of ancient and modern Russia. In her chapter on Catherine the Great, Massie tells of the empress's first and greatest lover, one Grigory Potemkin. While Catherine ruled an expanding empire, Potemkin governed the empress. In 1774 she took him as a lover, and secretly - apparently - as her husband.

Potemkin was a brilliant and eccentric confidante, friend, and military strategist. For all of that, he is probably best remembered for a trick he played on his beloved consort.

Among his many talents, this Potemkin was a genius at entertaining Catherine's important guests. Between the two were given some of the most extravagant and outrageous parties ever known to the vast empire, or even to the continent of Europe.

In 1787 - 13 years after their presumed marriage and 11 years after Potemkin abandoned her bed - this Grigory invited his former mistress and her entourage to join him for a floating tour on the Dnieper River to see the new harbor he had built at Sevastopol in Crimea, on the Black Sea. The tour included 80 galley boats painted red and gold, each outfitted with its own orchestra.

Potemkin had been given the task of creating new towns and villages along the Dnieper, but in 1787 only some had been completed.

So as not to disappoint the powerful tsarina, he required his builders to construct dozens of artificial villages along the river, false facades to look like real villages. He brought hundreds of peasants in from the countryside to stand before his artificial facades to give the appearance of reality. For this trick, Potemkin's name has passed into our glossary as representing something artificial, something pretty we use to cover up the less-than-beautiful truth. A Potemkin village is a facade.

But I tell this story not for its negative, but for its positive flavor.

Here is the difference between the arts and the sciences. The search for "real villages" is the task of the sciences. The creation of "artificial villages" is the task of the arts. And we would be terribly impoverished indeed if we were permitted to live exclusively in the "real villages" of this little planet. Sometimes the unvarnished truth is simply too painful to behold.

On December 15, Judy and I attended yet one more performance of the Augusta Youth Ballet Company's rendition of Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker." Once again we found ourselves enchanted by Herr Drosselmeyer's spell and by the dream envisioned by the lovely Clara.

We were mesmerized by the Waltz of the Flowers and by the Sugar Plum Fairy, by the Harlequin, Spanish and Chinese dancers. Our granddaughter Lindsey Ryan danced the angel solo and her brother Logan Warner portrayed the naughty little Fritz (a role for which he was well prepared!). A Potemkin village on stage and set to music.

This is the season for Potemkin villages.

I confess that I set up my little Smithsonian version of the Dewitt Clinton Electric Train again this year on the Friday after Thanksgiving. The train claims to be an exact replica of the original which made its maiden voyage from Albany to Schenectady on August 9, 1831.

Within the bounds of the little oval track are lighted two tiny Victorian houses and a pub named the Tally Ho. A model horse draws the village milk wagon down a snow-covered street while a miniature orchestra plays Christmas carols in the city park. Two lovers skate upon the icy pond while sandalwood incense burns in the fireplace. The Dewitt Clinton goes round and round on a seemingly endless voyage.

In the front room of our cozy West Virginia home, you can find a little manger scene. Mary and Joseph adore the baby Jesus as angels and shepherds stand by.

Christmas carols fill the air.

And we read the "artificial" and wonderful words of the Prophet Isaiah, a passage which has come to be known as The Peaceable Kingdom. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them."

That too is a Potemkin village. It is not the real world. If we apply the tools of science, we will not find The Peaceable Kingdom here within our midst. There is no peace on Earth, we say.

But we must not limit our vision to the results of scientific inquiry. We must dream dreams and imagine worlds we have never seen. In our hearts we can witness the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Nutcracker Prince.

And we can imagine a world where the leopard will lie down with the kid and a little child shall lead them. And we must believe in that world. It is our only hope.

December 21, 2002

Priesthood Reform

You don't have to tell me: Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. So here goes.

I have hesitated long on this one, but it has begun to dawn on me that the turmoil within the Catholic Church is not simply an internal matter. We are talking about American citizens, and we are talking about breaking the law. We are talking about crime and exploitation. It is a question of evil. It is no longer an internal affair.

Within this 21st century, and perhaps within my lifetime, the American Roman Catholic Church will admit women to the priesthood, will permit birth control, will terminate the pathological requirement of celibacy, and will either reform the international church or excuse itself from the Roman see. You heard it here.

I say this not because of great prophetic powers, but because I believe that this wonderful church will be courageous enough, and wise enough, collectively, to take the steps necessary to do the right thing.

I say this because I know bishops and cardinals are called upon to guide the 63 million or so American Catholics to reform the archaic and frankly sinful institutions of celibacy and sexism. To do otherwise would be shameful and irresponsible.

Brothers and sisters of the faith, it is time to do the right thing.

I say this because there can be no excuse for traveling down a path of hypocrisy and, frankly, a path of crime.

In the gospel of Matthew we read that Jesus commends those who for the sake of the kingdom have committed themselves to celibacy. The word he uses is "eunuch." But absolutely it must be said that He never recommends that this be made into law, nor did He ever suggest that it should be a requirement for anybody. "He who is able to receive this," He says, "let him receive it."

And ironically and immediately after this instruction, Jesus blessed the children. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me," we used to read in the King James Version of the Bible. Well, it can sadly be said that celibacy has caused the children to "suffer."

St. Paul also encourages celibacy. Not specifically for an ordained clergy, but for all who follow Christ - if they are able. But "if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry," he writes to the Corinthians. He also makes it overwhelmingly clear that celibacy is not necessary for church leadership. Only "false teachers" forbid marriage and demand abstinence, according to Paul.

Brothers and sisters, you know quite well the idea of celibacy misses the mark - by a very wide margin - established in the New Testament and the doctrines set forth in the early church. Jesus handed the keys of the kingdom over to a married man. On this rock, He said to that married man, I will build my church. Here begins what is widely known as the Apostolic Succession. False teachers indeed!

Nor did the Roman Church endorse a policy of celibacy for the first thousand years of its existence. The issue was presented at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, and it was defeated. Celibacy was reintroduced at the Council of Trullo in 692, but the Council reaffirmed the right of priests to marry. The Catholic Encyclopedia reports that Trullo demanded that "all clerics except bishops remain in wedlock."

Yet always lurking was the very pagan view that sex was filthy, a view that sacrifices made to the gods should not be soiled by priests who had had sexual intercourse.

Or at least who had intercourse the night before making the sacrifice.

Early in the 5th century, St. Jerome, one of the fathers of the church, proclaimed this pagan - not Christian - view that "all sexual intercourse is impure." But although Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin and gave us the Vulgate version of the New Testament, the church did not - for another 500 years - follow his lead regarding sex.

This is not the voice of New Testament. Jesus never suggests that sex is dirty.

Nor will you find such an idea in the Old Testament. The idea has no basis in the foundations of Jewish or Christian teaching. Zero. In fact, in the book of Genesis, the Great Lord God Jehovah tells Adam and Eve to cling to one another and to "be fruitful and multiply."

About 1,100 years after the death of Jesus Christ, the church first required celibacy of all priests. At the Second Lateran Council in A.D. 1139, the church required that the marriages of all priests be made null and void, and that no priest from that time forward may ever be married.

The amazing thing here is that the council clearly did not forbid sex. It forbade marriage. And this, apparently, was done not to protect the purity of the sacraments. It was done to protect church property. The legitimate sons of priests might inherit church property and deprive that institution of an important source of wealth and power. But the illegitimate sons of priests could not inherit, and were therefore no danger to the church. Illegitimate sexual liaisons were not forbidden, and the wives of priests were not forced to leave their husbands. They only lost their marriage license. The wives were made, says one Catholic scholar, into concubines. That was it!

Catholic apologists for celibacy claim that there are two reasons priests should not marry. First, celibacy is supported because, as St. Paul pointed out, a wife will cause divided loyalties. The married priest will serve his wife before his church. So?

But everybody knows that is a crazy idea - even if it comes from St. Paul. Come, now. Institutions everywhere require strong and dedicated leadership. I encourage Gazette readers to report one case in which any other institution has found that married people make bad leaders. If we truly believed that crazy idea we would elect only celibate presidents, appoint only celibate corporation executives, college presidents, military generals, and the like. Nobody believes that. The sum total of all who believe that notion is zero!

A celibate priesthood clings, in the final analysis, to the terribly pagan myth that sex is dirty, an idea supported nowhere in the Bible.

As I prepared for work this morning I heard a report on Public Radio. Somebody sent a survey to Catholic nuns and asked them for information on sexual abuse. That nun's tale was juicier than what we read in Chaucer! The report was unbelievably sad and incredibly terrible.

As it turns out, celibacy has not been a more perfect way. It has been the way of pathology. Time to face the music, my friends. Time to change the tune. You can do it. Do the right thing. What would Jesus do? And all that jazz.

January 31, 2003

The SARS Virus

"No man is an island," according to the great 17th century metaphysical poet. In our rapidly shrinking world, that is even more true today than it was when Anglican priest John Donne first penned those famous lines.

Judy and I were scheduled to become grandparents again. Not that six isn't a good number, but by the end of this year we were expecting Steve and Debbie to fly to China to retrieve one of the countless little girls discarded by unknown parents in a male-preference society. They had made contacts and plans, and a significant payment towards our seventh grandchild. Now it will not be.

China has a population problem - and also a gender problem. In 1992, Chinese scientists held a demographic seminar to discuss the 1990 census. Several scholars presented papers on what they called "the missing girl problem." It had become clear that in China and in other Asian countries, more females should have been born. Or survived. Many little girls were missing from the 1990 count. The explanation given is known as "son preference."

In China, India, and many other Southeast Asian societies, women are considered a liability or, at best, as having less value than men. This takes the form of son preference during pregnancy and thereafter.

Because the son is preferred, parents take better care of a son than a daughter, allow him more freedom, and allow him to play while daughters work. The son will receive more and better food, better medical care and attention, and a better education. Lacking adequate material resources, son preference becomes a "rational choice" in male-dominant societies.

Son preference also leads to female abortion, female infanticide, and female abandonment. In China, where the government allows only one child per family unit and places a severe economic penalty on those couples who produce more than their limit, it becomes important that the one child should be a son.

Modern technology allows the couple to know in advance whether their offspring will be a male or female. Abortion clinics are busy "taking care" of the female embryos.

Of those not aborted or killed at birth, many other little girls end up on street corners or the steps of orphanages just hours after they are born. Adoption agencies in America have stepped in to bring literally thousands of those little girls to a land where they will have loving homes. Steve and Debbie were about to become one of those adoptive couples. Now it will not be.

Last year, at some unknown date, a Chinese prawn dealer in the southern province of Guangdong contacted an unknown virus.

Now named the "severe acute respiratory syndrome" (SARS), evidently he passed that virus on to at least 90 more fellow Chinese. A physician who attended these patients traveled to Hong Kong, spreading the disease beyond the confines of China, and on March 15 the Chinese news agency first announced the existence of the disease.

Now the disease threatens to become pandemic. By the end of April, the World Health Organization counted more than 5,050 patients worldwide, and the virus infects another 200 every day. Today we read that Beijing has become a "ghost town," with everyone trying to keep away from crowds. And unnecessary tourism has been reduced to almost nothing. For now, there will be no parents flying to China to bring an unwanted daughter to a loving home. And we will have to be content with six grandchildren.

Do not ask for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

May 2, 2003

Stitch In Time

Ho Hum. Mary Lee Welliver's quilt won the "best of show" at the Strawberry Festival again this year. Stonewall Jackson Jubilee "best of show." First-place ribbons here and there. Showing at the Cultural Arts Center. Whatever!

I feel just a little bit sorry for the many other fine quilters who also enter their own excellent works of art. They can always try for "second best." With Mary Lee in the competition, nobody else can seriously expect to win. Like golfers playing while Tiger is out there on the green. Like women on the tennis courts knowing Serena is out there, too. There's nothing wrong with second place. Your work is almost as good as the winner's. Come on. That's pretty good. But Mary Lee is going to win first-place ribbons and "best of show," no matter what. Get over it.

Mary Lee chairs a really powerful social action committee at our church. We met at her house one evening a week after the 2003 Strawberry Festival. Our church committee is also known as the "Micah Six" committee, basing our work on a passage in the biblical book of Micah: "What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with thy God?"

I mean, I can't believe the stuff that comes out of that committee. Ken is chair of the local Habitat for Humanity committee. You can find photos of Ken up on somebody's roof with hammer in hand, nails in his mouth. Ken reports that a team of Yale bicyclists will be stopping in Buckhannon next week, raising money for Nicaragua. Marvin reports on a group of seminary students coming down from Drew to work with him on his Appalachian Studies class, and the work going on at the Tyrand Parish and at the Heart and Hand Mission in Philippi. Sarah keeps us informed on work at the Parish House. Bunny guides our letter writing campaigns. Mary Lee works with Bread for the World. Mac is raising money for the McDowell Mission. We are selling "Equal Exchange" coffee to put money back into the hands of the small farmers in the Third World. And to put poor Juan Valdez out of business! Phyl is preparing a sermon for annual conference.

You name it. This committee is doing it.

We met in their new room. The one in the back of their house. The one they added on about 20 years ago. Since that time, about 30 other college faculty families decided they/we would add a room onto the back of our houses, too, just to keep up with Ken and Mary Lee. Ken and Mary Lee, by the way, are taking all children and grandchildren on an 11-day Caribbean cruise to celebrate their 50th this summer.

What a family! I'm just glad I don't make quilts. It's too depressing with Mary Lee in the contest.

As I walked through the dining room on my way back to the Micah Six meeting, I happened to notice Mary Lee's quilt rack and the next "best of show" work she is piecing together. Beautiful. But I also know one thing about Mary Lee's quilts which does not appear on the quilting rack. I figured this out one morning as I was making our bed. I figured it out because the pillows we are sleeping on this week were cross-stitched by my mother some 30 or 40 years ago. Little flowers my mother stitched into those pillows not in order to win a prize. She created these little pieces of handiwork because she wanted to pass them down to her own children and grandchildren, that we might possess a small bit of her needlework after she is gone. Which she now is.

We have a lace tablecloth she crocheted and which won a ribbon at the Kansas Free Fair half a century ago. And I know very well that my mother put her tablecloth in the competition at the fair as a second thought. She was making those things for me, not the fair.

My father used to paint scenes of nature with his oil paints. He painted in the basement, and for years you could always find his latest work of art up on the easel. Beside the messy pallet and the little tubes of paint. He started painting those scenes one day as we walked through the exhibits at the Kansas Free Fair. He stopped to watch this fellow paint wildlife scenes on little round mirrors, leaving the sky and the lake unpainted - as mirror. Dad decided that he could do that, too.

He gave dozens of pictures to friends around Topeka, but he gave me some of his best. He also won a blue ribbon at that fair nearly 50 years ago, and that picture of the state capital hangs beside our dining room table today. But he didn't paint it for the fair. He painted it for me.

And it just hit me this morning as I made the bed, straightening out the sheets and fluffing the pillows with those little cross-stitched pillowcases. Mary Lee is not making those quilts for the festivals and the jubilees. She is making them for her children and her grandchildren. And frankly, they will serve as a tiny reminder of immortality when, years from now, her grandchildren straighten the quilts on their beds and fluff their pillows.

June 17, 2003

Keeper of the Drum

You've never heard of Pawhuska, Oklahoma. That's a little cow town 30 miles west of Bartlesville on U.S. 60 in the northeastern corner of the Panhandle State. We spent a couple of nights in Pawhuska because it serves as the capital of the Osage Nation. It's also just about 30 miles east of a place called Gray Horse.

A sign on Main Street points to the offices of the Osage Nation three blocks to the north, just beside the Tribal Museum and the old BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) offices.

You know you're in the West when a big sign hangs across the street announcing the Osage County Cattlemen's Convention and the Ben Johnson Memorial Steer Roping Contest.

You know you're in the West when every man and boy wears a Stetson hat and cowboy boots, and the marquee above the Bluestem Cafe advertises biscuits and gravy, \$2.00. You know you're in the West when the sign on the Hernandez Restaurant announces "Mi casa, su casa."

Things are pretty laid-back out here, and the folks in Osage County will do their best to make you feel at home. But when I asked the waitress at Hernandez's if she could "ring me up" for my cup of coffee, she replied that "I haven't never done that before." At least she didn't say "ain't." Mi casa, su casa.

Judy and I have taken Wesleyan students out here to witness the Oklahoma Indian powwows and ceremonial dances nearly a dozen times over the past 30 years, but this year we came with family and friends.

Dr. Alice Ann Callahan, my fine arts teacher when I was a student at Baker University, is a member of the Osage Nation. For years, she has been asking Judy and me to accompany her to witness the Osage dances, and we finally worked it out. Judy's sister, Pinky, and her husband, Kirby, accompanied us down here to Pawhuska.

I only took that fine arts class - nearly 50 years ago - because it was a required two-semester course, but I confess I must have learned more new stuff in that class than in any other class I ever took. Alice Ann taught us to recognize and appreciate the great musicians and the great artists of the Western world, an appreciation which causes me to this day to keep my radio set to NPR, and has guided Judy and me to visit many of the great art museums of the Western world.

I have told Alice Ann more than once that the musicians and artists I discovered in that class have become my "canon" - the official list I keep in my head. If I did not learn the name Purcell in that fine arts class, he will just not make it into my personal canon. That's a bit narrow-minded, I confess, but I have had to work pretty hard to extend my appreciation beyond those hundred or so musicians and artists.

Actually, Judy introduced me to Henry Purcell in 1960, when I stood at the front of a church in California and watched her father bring her down the aisle. Alice Ann apologized for Purcell.

From the Black Gold Motel in Pawhuska, we drove another 30 miles into the Oklahoma wilderness to locate the Osage Ceremonial Dances in a dusty place called Gray Horse. Gray Horse, Oklahoma.

I get it. Black gold! Those who know a bit of American Indian history know that when Frank Phillips discovered oil beneath the red Oklahoma soil, a lot of that oil lay under the reservation set aside for the Osage people. Our forefathers forcibly moved the Osage Indians from southern Missouri to a place we once called Indian Territory more than a century ago, and unintentionally located them on top of one of the world's great oil fields. Even today the Osage people whose names are listed on the official rolls receive a sizeable monthly check from the black gold reserves belonging to their tribe.

The drum is the center of the Osage ceremonial dances. We arrived at Gray Horse on a Friday afternoon just in time to hear the drums echoing across the eastern Oklahoma hills, and to watch the final hour of the afternoon ceremonies, held in the great Osage "arbor."

The "arbor" is a corrugated and galvanized steel roof protecting the earthen dance floor.

For supper, we were the invited guests of the young man designated as the Keeper of the Drum, and before we ate, the Keeper's grandfather told all who ate in his tent how Kiowas sold the drum to the Osage Nation in 1885, and for the past 118 years this is the drum they have used in their ceremonies. We ate hominy and buffalo beef at long community tables, and I learned that the fellow sitting beside me was planning to write a book on Indian ceremonies and costumes, and that he had gotten interested in Indian lore when he was a Boy Scout in California. I cut a piece of coconut custard pie for my desert. That evening, we watched and listened for three hours as some 200 beautifully costumed Osage men and boys, young and old, performed their traditional warrior dances.

I've just been reading Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations." Huntington makes a strong argument that multiculturalism will be the death of Western civilization, and that we can save ourselves only by reaffirming the principle: *e pluribus unum*. Emphasis on the *unum*. By which I take it that this great scholar would work hard to take the juice out of the Osage people, and tell them to stop dancing to their different drummer. I believe he is wrong. I am too much in love with the *pluribus*.

June 23, 2003

Germ Warfare

I was greatly relieved when I heard that President Bush had decided to go after the weapons of mass destruction. Those things are really scary. I mean, germs in the water supply, poison gas, bacteria on the subway, virus in the ventilation system. Not to mention the new generation of "nukes." I don't like to think about stuff like that. Those things could make the twin towers on 9/11 look like child's play. Makes me sick.

So really, when I knew my president was planning to work on the WMD, I was really enthusiastic. But it's like he didn't know where to look. With all those scientists and generals working for him, he should have known. He didn't need to send a lot of American soldiers to the Middle East. He could have started right here at home.

America's modern venture into biological and chemical warfare started in 1942 when Franklin Roosevelt, informed that scientists in Berlin and Tokyo were working on "bugs and gas," deplored their evil while initiating our own clandestine adventures. The man appointed to head up the program was George Merck, author of the famed Merck Manual, the physicians' guide to diseases and symptoms. The site chosen for the dirty work was Camp Detrick, an old army base just outside the sleepy 18th century town of Frederick, Maryland. Work was begun the next year, and soon the camp, renamed Fort Detrick, was a small but booming military metropolis.

For the next three decades, a cadre of some of America's leading physicians and scientists, many of whom had sworn the Hippocratic Oath, secretly devoted countless hours behind those army gates planning a myriad of ways to defend against germ and chemical attacks but also to employ, if necessary, the same against the enemies of freedom and democracy.

Anthrax, smallpox, Ebola, botulism, encephalitis, tularemia, and the plague were among the nasty weapons hidden behind the barricaded confines of that Maryland compound and another, later, at Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Most Americans now know the story of the Manhattan Project, located 7,000 feet above sea level in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and guided by such physicists as Albert Einstein, Edward Teller, and Enrico Fermi.

We all have seen photos of the deadly mushroom clouds that ascended high above the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our parallel venture into "bugs and gas" is much less known.

Our experiments on voluntary and unsuspecting innocent human victims are enough to turn your stomach.

Did you know, for instance, that many Seventh Day Adventists who refused to serve in the army in World War II were willing to donate their living bodies to nefarious biological research?

And we used them as guinea pigs.

To his everlasting credit, President Richard Nixon, on November 25, 1969, renounced the use of biological weapons, and for a time our nation did, in fact, get out of this nasty business. Nixon was under pressure from the left to get out of Vietnam, and his decision might be regarded as sop thrown to protesters. Nevertheless, it was an important step in the right direction.

In 1972 the United States, the Soviet Union, and more than 100 other nations signed on to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the first ever such agreement between nations. The Convention forbids nations to develop, acquire, or deploy biological or chemical weapons.

As of today, some 143 nations have signed the treaty.

We know now, sadly, that the Soviet Union utilized the convention to step up its research in the field of biological and chemical weapons, secretly developing enough anthrax alone to kill every human on the face of the earth. Many times over. So did Iraq continue to research and develop weapons of biological and chemical warfare.

Germ warfare research has continued unabated throughout the past 30-some years in the United States, but since 1972 it continued, for the most part, only for defense and prevention. Our scientists have developed many of the germ weapons in small amounts in order to test the antibiotics and vaccines necessary to protect Americans from a germ attack.

Our research still falls far short of the goal of full protection, however, and of course the normal progress of science requires continued vigilance. But in recent years American scientists have pushed the limits of the treaty, and the line between defense and offense has become very blurry. In fact many scientists and ethicists today believe that our research has broken the 1972 convention. As long ago as 1986 a lawsuit forced the Defense Department to admit that biological and chemical warfare research was secretly under way at 127 different locations across America. More recently new "violations" have been carried out by the Pentagon and the CIA, partly behind President Clinton's back, and today with the full blessing of President Bush. We are carrying out research that, if done by our enemies, would be cause for great alarm.

So now President George W. Bush is opposed to arms control, negotiated disarmament, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the germ warfare treaty, and most recently he has called for a "new generation" of bunker busters and a resumption of atomic testing.

We have refused to sign on to the land mine treaty. Where is the "New World Order" his father promised us? And will we find our security by going it alone, or in strengthening the international agencies for global peace?

July 14, 2003

The Equal Rights Path

I am pretty sure not many Gazette readers are familiar with the name Victoria C. Woodhouse. They should be. For on April 22, 1871, Victoria C. Woodhouse announced her candidacy for the office of President of the United States. According to the Women's History Project, this was the first time a woman ever seriously announced her intention to serve the nation as CEO in the White House. Victoria C. Woodhouse ran on a platform calling for "Progress, Free Thought, and Untrammelled Lives."

It was her intention, she claimed, to pave the way for future generations. She announced her candidacy in the Woodhill and Claflin's Weekly newspaper as the nominee of the Cosmo-Political Party, "Subject to ratification by the [upcoming] national convention." In the end, Victoria C. Woodhouse failed in her bid for the White House.

But she succeeded in paving the way for others in a far distant future.

When the Civil War came to an end, the United States Congress passed three quick Amendments to the Constitution. The 13th Amendment put an end to slavery. The 14th Amendment granted us all equal protection under the law. And the 15th Amendment granted the vote to all who had passed their 21st birthday. But were these amendments intended to emancipate women? Not on your life. They freed the African slaves, presumably gave them the vote and equal protection, but they were not at all intended to liberate women.

In 1872, Susan B. Anthony and 14 other women, including the indomitable Sojourner Truth, attempted - without success - to cast their votes in the national election. Anthony and others were arrested and jailed for their presumptuous deeds. But they too were paving the way for another generation. That path was never easy.

The next year a professor at the Harvard Medical College, Dr. Edward Clark, announced that "higher education harms women and their future offspring." Clark was quoted for years by those who wanted to keep the doors of opportunity closed to the other gender.

Under the guidance of Ms. Anthony, a bill for women's suffrage was introduced into the United States Congress in 1878, but it took 42 more years before Congress, and the States, passed the 19th Amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote.

In my classes I show a 1906 photograph of a Lewiston, Maine women's basketball team. As some of you know, women's basketball teams had six players, three for the forecourt, three for the back. That was necessary because, as everyone knows, women are not physically able to run the full length of a basketball court. The six-member team remained in effect while I attended junior high in Topeka, Kansas, in spite of the fact that in 1950 Florence Chadwick swam the English Channel for the first of four times, and Babe Didrikson Zaharius (of golfing fame) had won two gold medals in the 1932 Olympics - in the javelin and the 80 meter hurdles, and took silver in the high jump because she cleared the bar head first in her final jump.

I also ask my students to read the story of Bobbi Gibb, the first woman known to run the full length of the Boston Marathon. Her application to run was rejected in 1965 because of her gender, so she hid in the bushes and entered the race the next year - wearing a sweatshirt over her jersey to disguise her identity. A small group of men running near her recognized what was happening, promised to protect her from harassment, and with their support she removed the sweatshirt. She was cheered and jeered for the rest of the run down Beacon Street and into Copley Square. There she was congratulated by Gov. Volpe as she completed the race.

As you can guess, the female athletes in my classes are much inspired by her story, and they often report their own struggles to gain respect from the male athletes in their own high schools.

Women were granted the right to vote in some state elections a full decade before Congress passed the 19th Amendment. Women in the state of Washington were granted the vote in 1910, and in California in 1911. They could vote for state offices, but could not vote for presidents, senators, or members of Congress until 1920.

Last summer Judy and I took the Great American Train Trip, a circuit from Lawrence, Kansas, to Lawrence, Kansas, by way of Santa Fe, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Glacier National Park, and Chicago. On the book rack at Glacier National Park I saw the biography of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to serve in the United States Congress. Ms. Rankin was elected by the people of Montana in 1916, four years before she was allowed to vote for herself.

I tell this story because today that path is increasingly an open path for women who want to serve in government. Today two women serve in the Supreme Court and 14 serve as members of the United States Senate. One of those women, Elizabeth Dole, tried unsuccessfully to seek the Republican nomination for the highest office in the land, and another senator, the one currently serving the people of the state of New York, will probably seek that office in 2008.

We all saw the recent poll that reported that most Democrats could not name a single Democratic candidate currently seeking that highest office. But they knew very well the name of Hillary Clinton.

Go, Hillary!

September 15, 2003

Voices For Peace

I spent a long weekend at Shadowcliff early in the summer. Shadowcliff is the national home office of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It is located in Nyack, New York, on the west bank of the Hudson River, alongside the Palisades, 18 miles north of New York City. This is Sleepy Hollow country. From the riverbank you can look to the right, south, and see the Tappan Zee Bridge.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) is America's oldest interfaith peace organization, begun in Europe just days after the outbreak of World War I when a German Lutheran pastor shook hands with a British Quaker, promising each other not to serve the war effort but to seek a peaceful solution to their respective nations' conflict.

Perhaps their efforts did not reduce the killing at that time, and the War to End All Wars bogged down in the trenches, boys on both sides dying by the millions, leaving bones and flesh to rot in the cold winter mud. But the dream of peace and the commitment to non-violence are alive and well today.

By 1915 the FOR was established on Long Island, and today boasts some 70,000 members and friends in America, more than three hundred of whom live in West Virginia.

The FOR is active in more than forty countries worldwide. I have been a member for more than forty years.

One of my most treasured memories is a FOR evening spent at a dinner table with Norman Thomas, listening to him tell "war stories" of his life in prison as a conscientious objector in 1917-1918.

On November 11, Janet Chisholm, FOR non-violence trainer, will speak at Wesleyan chapel, sponsored by the Brad Long Peace Education fund. Brad Long died in a tragic traffic accident in 1983, and his mother set aside a trust fund in his memory to further a cause which was dear to his heart.

I was able to sandwich a few moments between committee meetings to slip down to the basement and rummage through the musty archives. I wanted to revive some wonderful memories, and my desire was satisfied when I located the stash of old Fellowship magazines.

During our Easter break at Boston University in 1960 I had joined a group of students, members of the FOR, for a trip to Frederick, Maryland. There we located Ft. Detrick and joined Larry Scott, who stood vigil in protest against America's production of chemical and biological weapons at the Army fort.

From dawn to dusk we all stood silently in the snow flurries and chilling rain before the front gate, holding protest signs opposing weapons of mass destruction. For Larry Scott this was a long-term commitment. Larry had already stood before that gate for more than a year, and he was determined to continue until our nation terminated this frightening and irresponsible behavior. Those protests continued - off and on - for nearly a decade. In the archives at Shadowcliff I located the story of the Ft. Detrick protest and a photo of Larry Scott.

Were we successful in our protest? I do not know. But I do know that nine years later President Nixon, under continued pressure from the voices of the Peace Movement, grown large during the Vietnam War, ended biological and chemical testing in the United States.

I believe that our voices were heard by those who make decisions.

Nor was this Larry Scott's first adventure into non-violent protest. On March 25, 1958, Scott had joined Albert Bigelow and others to protest atmospheric nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean. Scott, Bigelow, and the others sailed a small boat, a ketch they called the Golden Rule, into the test area, purposely violating Navy regulations in their attempt to give voice to their opposition. An act of civil disobedience.

On May 1 a U.S. Coast Guard cutter picked them all up and the tests went on as scheduled, while the crew of the Golden Rule spent sixty days in a Honolulu jail.

But the story made the newspapers all over the world. It appeared in the New York Times, Le Monde, Le Figero, Die Welt, Pravda, The London Times, and other such papers, hopefully to the shame of President Eisenhower. Nothing was immediately done to end the testing, but the Cuban Missile Crisis in October, 1962, frightened all members of the so-called "nuclear club," and on August 5, 1963, President John F. Kennedy joined Harold Macmillan and Nikita Khrushchev in signing the nuclear test ban treaty.

I do not know whether the Golden Rule helped our president to make a good decision, but I would like to believe that it did. That small group of men represented, in fact, a worldwide fear of Armageddon. There in the archives at Shadowcliff I found the story and the photographs of Scott, Bigelow, and the Golden Rule.

These simple actions are considered "radical" in the books of many. But the "radical" actions of a few often become public policy in the not-so-distant future. They are the first swallows in San Juan Capistrano. The voices of Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Berrigan brothers, and others lead me to believe that Margaret Mead was correct. "Never doubt that a small, highly committed group of individuals can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Nor are the voices for peace as lonely today as they were when Scott and Bigelow sailed the Golden Rule. Earlier this year the protests around the globe numbered in the countless millions as citizens from many nations joined to tell George Bush not to start a war in Iraq. Of course at that time he turned a deaf ear, but even so the breadth and depth of that protest must be holding him in check as he guides our military efforts in a foreign land.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (www.forusa.org), with its home office along the banks of the Hudson River, provides the orchestration for those whose hearts long to sing this simple song: *Dona nobis pacem*.

October 9, 2003

Ralph Nader, Go Home

Ralph Nader, go home!

We don't want you. We don't need you. Go home!

I visited the home page of the Green Party the other day. I really liked the first line. It reads, "Please join us as we build toward a more democratic, cooperative, cleaner, safer world where we the people, not the corporations, make the decisions that affect our lives." I couldn't agree more.

Here's what they are against: These guys are against war, exploitation of the weak by the powerful, and against the massive globalization of huge corporations. They stand against oppressive functions of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), and other such global organizations.

The Greens want our nation to stop military incursions into the Third World, and they want big American corporations to stop stealing the natural resources found therein. They want America to stop blockading food and medical supplies destined for the hungry and the sick in foreign lands. And so forth. Seldom have I read a finer list of objectives. I think I agree with every one of them. So what's my point?

Contrary to the pledge made on their home page, in fact the Greens have not made the world safer for democracy, and they have given us a world where the great corporations make more decisions. We do not have cleaner air and cleaner water. Because of the Greens, our water and our air are more soiled than ever.

I am still trying to figure out what motivated the Greens to break the power of the only force able to stop George W. Bush. It's like, "If the Democrats won't adopt our platform, we will just show them. They can't win without us, and we will take our marbles and give the election to the Republicans."

Folks, for those of you who love Bush and think he is doing a great job, please thank the Green Party and its presidential candidate, Nader, for delivering the 2000 election to the party on the Right. Nader, the great consumer advocate of the 20th century, and his wonderful Green Party are the ones responsible for the election of Bush.

But if you are not happy with the current administration in our nation's capital, don't blame Florida. Don't blame Katherine Harris. Don't blame the U.S. Supreme Court. Blame Green. Blame Ralph.

For those of you who think the election of Bush was America's greatest mistake in recent history, please join me in this request. Let's tell Nader and his Green Party to stay out of West Virginia! And Nebraska. And Ohio. And politics in general. Stay out of the next presidential election. We don't need you to deliver another election to that Texas cowboy, and to his party of corporate greed and ecological abandon.

In case you didn't get it, those dreams I cited above, those beautiful dreams of democracy and equality, of clean water and clean air, etc., are also the dreams of most members of the Democratic Party. Sure, we all want those things, and more.

But the way to attain those lofty goals is not by dividing the liberal vote in America into two weakened parts. If that has not played into the Republican goal of "divide and conquer," I know not what does.

Greens, in the last presidential election, you drained enough votes out of the Democratic pot to give the victory to the great George W. You did it in two states. In New Hampshire, George Bush beat Al Gore by a meager 7,211 votes. Ralph Nader garnered 94,554 votes in New Hampshire. Those votes came from the left. He skimmed them off the Democratic vote. Those votes would have gone to Gore!

And what difference does that make? In the Electoral College, Bush won by a mere five votes, 271-266. And New Hampshire carried four votes to that college - for George W. Bush. Four votes the other way and Al Gore is our president.

I hardly need mention the race in Florida, the chads, the butterfly ballots, the Votomatic machines. Many people blame Katherine Harris, Florida's secretary of state. And they blame the U.S. Supreme Court for overturning the decision made by the Florida Supreme Court. I recently read a powerful book by Alan M. Dershowitz titled, "Supreme Injustice," a critique of that action taken by our great Supreme Court. When push came to shove, the Supreme Court voted five to four - five Republican appointees voting for Bush, and four Democrat appointees voting for Gore. But forget all of that. It was the Green Party that stole the election.

Florida delivered 25 votes for Bush in the Electoral College. And in Florida, Bush "won" by just 537 votes. The final count was 2,912,790 (Bush) to 2,912,253 (Gore). And guess what. Ralph Nader took 97,448 votes out of what would have given us a Democratic victory.

Nader, go home. Do something useful for a change. And please stay out of politics. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. It was those good intentions laid down like bricks on that very road that gave us a Republican victory in the elections of 2000. And a \$100 billion-plus war in Iraq. And 500 dead young Americans. And the loss of respect we once held in the international community. And the biggest tax break for the rich in American history. And weakened Social Security and Medicare systems. That's what happens when you send to Washington a member of the party of the rich and the obscenely rich. That's what happens when Nader and his Greens monkey in politics.

Go home, Ralph Nader!

February 25, 2004

The Weapon Has Become Too Heavy

April 4 is the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He was killed 36 years ago, shortly after six o'clock in the evening. He was not yet 40 years old.

Of course I know where I was when I learned that King had been shot. I was teaching an evening class at the College of Emporia in Kansas when a student broke the news to me.

Judy and I attended Boston University for several years beginning in the autumn of 1958, she in the College of Liberal Arts, I in the School of Theology. King had studied in those same rooms, walked those same hallways, listened to those same professors deliver their lectures. He worshipped in Marsh Chapel, as we did, courted his girlfriend just as I courted mine - on the walkways along the Charles River, the paths through the Fenway, the Boston Common, and the Boston Garden.

In 1962, Judy and I heard King deliver a sermon titled "Paul's Letter to the Churches in America" in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And because I was the Boston field worker for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in 1963, that wonderful group of people - pacifists - paid our way to represent them at the March on Washington, where King said, "I have a dream." I felt a great sense of personal loss when King was killed.

At the time he was shot in 1968, King was honorary national chairman of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, America's oldest interfaith peace organization, but in the beginning, King did not believe in nonviolence. It was this organization that persuaded him to adopt the principles he espoused throughout the remaining 13 years of his life. This is a story not much known.

While I was the FOR field worker in Boston, my "boss" was a heavysset white Methodist minister, director of field work for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a man named Glenn Smiley. I did not know at that time what a powerful role he had played in the formation of the civil rights movement, and thus the shaping of American history.

Shortly after Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, and the African-American community formed the now-famous bus boycott, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, based in Nyack, New York, sent Smiley down to Montgomery to meet with Dr. King. The year was 1955. King did not know Smiley. I do not know if he even knew of the FOR, but that organization was to play a major role in his life, and thus in the history of our great nation.

As Smiley approached the front door of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he was met at the door by two armed guards. When he asked if he could meet with Dr. King, they informed him that King was busy. "I will wait," Smiley replied.

He waited for about two hours.

Smiley wanted to talk about nonviolence. "If your skin were black," King informed him, "you would understand why we have armed guards at this door." King did not want to listen to a "sermon" on nonviolence; that was white man's nonsense. As Smiley departed, he gave King a big hug. He felt a holster under King's jacket. "Someday that weapon will become too heavy for you," Smiley told King.

Dr. King took Smiley's words to heart, and a few weeks later, he asked Smiley to come back to Montgomery. "The weapon has become too heavy for me," he said. When Smiley returned, he found that the guards at the door were gone.

The bus boycott lasted 381 days. During that year, King was arrested and put in jail. The mug shot of King shows that he was prisoner number 7089. His house was bombed. He received regular death threats. He knew that his family was also in danger. The Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens' Council did all they could to break the boycott and to maintain the so-called "Southern way of life."

But on November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court - the "Warren Court" - ruled that bus segregation violated the U.S. Constitution, and demanded that the city of Montgomery end this policy.

Although the court handed down its ruling in November, the command did not take effect until December 21. Meanwhile, King continued to counsel the African-American community in Montgomery, insisting on nonviolence throughout the final days of the boycott, and on courtesy toward all when the day of victory arrived.

In the years to come, King loved to tell the story of an old woman who walked to work through those difficult days of 1955 and 1956. When the court ruled in their favor, King advised this old woman that she should go ahead and ride the bus. Your feet are tired, he told her. "Oh no," she replied. "Oh no. My feet are tired, but my soul is rested." She refused to ride until the day of victory arrived.

And as that day approached, Smiley returned to Montgomery and spoke to King. "I want to collect my payment now for helping with the boycott," Smiley told King.

"Well, we have no money to pay you."

"I don't want money. I want to ride with you on that first day when you sit in the front of the bus."

A famous photo of the civil rights movement showed the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and his wife sitting on the front seat of a bus in Montgomery. Behind them sits Martin Luther King Jr. Beside King sits a heavyset white fellow who told King that someday his weapon would become too heavy.

March 30, 2004

What's Wrong With This Picture?

I am thinking about the way our military forces went into the former Yugoslavia, how they joined other NATO men and women to carry out a most difficult task. Their task was essentially to stand between warring parties, to stop the fighting, to bring an end to conflict in the Balkans. They stood between Serbs and Bosnians, between Serbs and Kosovars, between so-called Christian forces and Islamic forces. They were not out to destroy an enemy. They were peacekeepers. And they brought about an end to conflict. They brought peace to the Balkans. They were a professional army.

I'm thinking about the women's volleyball teams, the women's basketball teams, the women's softball teams here in the West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, the WVIAC. They play hard. They do their best to win the match. But when the game is over, they all line up and meet each other with right hand up, each competitor touching the hand of each opponent. A show of respect.

I'm thinking of a strong image burned into my mind. If I ask you to conjure up in your mind the image of Mohammed Ali, one of the best heavyweight boxers of the 20th century, many would come up with the same mental photo. It is the great Mohammed Ali standing over Sonny Liston. Liston is on his back on the canvas. Ali is peering down at his defeated opponent. Like, "I kicked your butt, buster!" Gloating.

And now I am thinking of George W. Bush standing on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, dressed in a flight suit. The smile on his face and the body language tell a very strong story. We kicked butt, fellows.

Bush is gloating.

And now I am thinking of a young woman. The year is 1862. It is the bloodiest day of the Civil War. The location is a battlefield where blood flowed deep into the rows of September corn. Her name was Clara Barton, and she was appalled by the screams and the groans she heard as the men at Antietam lay dying in the mud.

She is working with army surgeons to save the lives of wounded soldiers. A bullet pierces her blouse and kills the man she is cradling. She is the founder of the American Red Cross.

I am thinking of Henri Dunant, Swiss humanitarian, whose book, *Un Souvenir de Solferino* (1862), described the suffering of some 40,000 men after the battle of Solferino (1859). His work led to the founding of the International Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and to international agreements between nations at war, agreements which would protect combatants after the battle. Those agreements were later codified as the Geneva Conventions, and in 1901 Dunant was named the first recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace.

I am thinking of a wonderful young woman from West Virginia, captured after the firefight, carried to an Iraqi hospital by an "enemy" soldier, treated and cared for by an Iraqi hospital staff who saw her not as an enemy but as a human being.

And I am thinking of those unbelievable photographs we have all been looking at, prisoners piled naked on the floor, and the American soldiers dressed in army fatigues with thumbs up, gloating.

What's wrong with this picture?

April 14, 2004

Survival of the Fittest

My father tells this pretty strange story. About 30 years ago, Dad went home to Whiting, Kansas, for the funeral of his younger brother. At the graveside service, Dad noticed a fellow whose face he recognized, but he couldn't remember who he was. Turns out the man had once taught biology in the Whiting High School, but only for one year. Dad asked him why he didn't stay longer.

"I was fired for teaching evolution," the stranger explained. "The board of education let me go after that one year." Dad asked: "Do you remember who the chairman of the school board was back then?" He replied: "Your father."

I don't know what year that would have been, but it had to have been after 1925, the year of the famous Scopes trial. My grandfather just didn't want evolution taught in Whiting, Kansas.

I have long been fascinated with Charles Darwin, the naturalist who studied the tortoises and the iguanas on the Galapagos Islands during his five-year voyage on HMS Beagle. In 1859, a quarter of a century after his short visit to the islands, Darwin published "The Origin of Species," a book which changed the way we understand ourselves and the world around us. Darwin's observations led him to describe a process he called "natural selection."

It was that book which made John Scopes a household name back in 1925, and which got my father's new acquaintance fired a few years later. For many conservative Christians, the "Monkey Trial" was the most important event of that fateful year.

Although we often attribute the term "survival of the fittest" to Charles Darwin, that was not his term. That was a phrase coined in 1851 by a British self-taught philosopher named Herbert Spencer. Yet a bunch of so-called economists have taken to mixing up those ideas with the other word, "evolution," to give us a justification for the naked greed and self-righteous acquisitiveness we find in the marketplace today.

Under the flag of "capitalism," these economic theorists have guided the American voter down a path of self-destruction. This is politics on the right-hand side of the spectrum.

This theory of "survival of the fittest" makes its way into so-called popular religion under the theological precept, "God helps those who help themselves." And so, with the help of the good Lord, the rich get richer and the poor get what they deserve.

Listen to the words of Herbert Spencer: "The poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle ... are the decrees of a large, far-seeing benevolence ... which brings to early graves the children of diseased parents" Et cetera. Spencer preached what came to be called "Social Darwinism." Only the fit should survive, and while life is admittedly uncomfortable for the children of poverty, that "far-seeing benevolence" improves the species by killing off those incapable of "helping themselves." And their children! And the rich must not help the poor, because by that very act they would stand in the way of natural selection and progress. Capitalism is very, very good.

One 19th-century capitalist put it this way: "The growth of a large business is merely the survival of the fittest. The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendour and fragrance which bring cheer to the beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up round it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God."

And William Graham Sumner, the famed Social Darwinist of the late 19th century, made himself popular with American capitalists with his defense of naked greed. "Millionaires are a product of natural selection," wrote this Yale professor.

Funny how things work. Charles Darwin's five-year expedition took him unexpectedly to a group of islands 650 miles off the Pacific coast of Ecuador, and 25 years later he coined the term "natural selection." That term supported Spencer's "survival of the fittest," and Professor Sumner spoke of Social Darwinism.

Those ideas provided a formidable challenge to theologians everywhere who clung to a literal interpretation of the Bible, but the so-called "modernists" put God in charge of evolution and thereby justified the "law of nature" in the wilderness as well as in the marketplace.

If I remember correctly, Jesus blessed the poor and praised the Good Samaritan. But here we find a god who blesses those who help themselves, and who wants to improve the race by sending the poor to an early grave. Sounds to me like the very theology of those who would demolish Social Security and annihilate the many pieces of social legislation that provide a safety net for all who find themselves on hard times. Sounds to me like the theology preached deep in the heart of Texas these days.

If God helps those who help themselves, shouldn't our government do the same? Sounds to me like the "trickle-down" theory of economics, and George Bush's tax break for the rich. Sounds like Republican theology to me.

July 9, 2004

The Values Voters

As the 2004 election campaign drew to a close, I attached my waning energy to a small group of men and women of faith concerned with the many failures, countless lies, and increasingly thoughtless, reckless and evil policies of the George W. Bush administration.

Together we fashioned a statement that represented what some would call the "religious left." We wrote a document titled "People of Faith for Kerry." We published it in nine West Virginia newspapers, to combat what we considered the inappropriate political activity coming from the "religious right." Some members of our little group, and others of the 600 people of faith who signed our document, did so at considerable risk to their careers and their livelihood.

Now we hear that this election was not about policy but about "values," which implies that the religious right voted for good values, while the valueless "secular left" endorsed only the politics of smoke-filled back-room deals. That is a mischievous interpretation of the re-election of Bush.

For those who voted for Bush, this election was not about good government. The so-called values guiding the religious right - and therefore the Republican camp - have nothing to do with the fact that President Bush squandered the budgetary surplus of \$230 billion inherited from the Clinton administration and led this nation into a current annual deficit of \$455 billion. Squandering seems not to threaten any "values" under consideration. In spite of that, Bush proposed a \$1.35 trillion tax break over the next decade, almost all of which will go to the very rich. Actually, good government is not cheap, and those dollars will be sorely missed. Social Security payments, for one thing, will need those dollars. Our nation will pay a dear price for such folly.

For Bush supporters, this election was not about life and death, nor was it about war and peace. I have listened to those post-election interviews with Southern Baptist preachers who told their parishioners to go into the voting booth and "vote their values."

By that, they freely admit their congregations knew it meant to vote for Bush. Those preachers seem to be oblivious to the fact that Bush took us into an unjustified and increasingly winless war and sold us a pack of lies so we would march to his tune.

As I write these words, I hear the report that another two dozen American soldiers lost their lives in the most recent attack on our men and women in uniform. Those in addition to the more than 1,300 other Americans now killed in action. Those in addition to the countless thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children killed in this useless war. Not a problem to those who voted their "values."

I can find no evidence of a good Samaritan on the screen of those right-wing "people of faith" who voted their "values" on November 2 - not even a bleep on their extremely narrow screen.

The point of the Bible's most recognized and most beloved parable is not that there was once a nice fellow. The point is that Jesus gave it as an illustration that we might want to follow. The good Samaritan was neither a Christian nor a Jew. He was a man of an alien faith, yet Jesus tells us to go and do likewise.

Ever see a man taking his lunch from a garbage can? A woman? A child? Go to Washington someday. Today, about 36 million Americans live in poverty. Many are homeless. Many eat from garbage cans. More today than four years ago. That does not bother the people who voted their "values." One in six children in America live in poverty. Not to worry, America elected a man of values.

Nearly 40 million Americans lack health insurance today. Eighty percent of those uninsured and under the age of 65 live in families with at least one full-time employee. Many live in families with two full-time workers. One in eight is a child. More people today lack health insurance than when Bush took office. Many of these will not seek health care when they need it. They have nothing to pay for it.

Where is the good Samaritan among those who voted their "values"?

Many conservative Christians will argue that the good Samaritan is not about good government. But those of us on the religious left will argue that Jesus taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." That parable is very much about good government. It is about a good kingdom on Earth.

Those who voted their "values" gave absolutely zero consideration to global warming, clean air, clean oceans, and other issues related to the environment. This is the only physical home we and our grandchildren are ever going to have, and responsible stewards care for their place of residence. Those who voted their "values" have not been responsible stewards. George Bush is not a responsible steward of Planet Earth.

I will say to you on the right-hand side of the political and religious spectrum, you have not chosen good government. You chose bad government. You have not voted for good values, you voted for bad values. You followed some Pied Piper preachers who led you into a world of false and ignorant "values." You, and all of us, will pay a heavy price for what you have done.

Three centuries before the birth of Christ, a Greek king named Pyrrhus crossed the Adriatic Sea with 20,000 men and a few elephants in his boats. He defeated his Roman foe, but at considerable cost. After being congratulated on his victory, he is reported to have replied that another such victory would undo him completely. I say to those of the religious right that your victory at the polls will soon enough prove to be Pyrrhic indeed.

January 10, 2005

No Child Left Behind

Perhaps you thought that our new federal plan for education in America will "leave no child behind." Boy, were you wrong. This so-called education program was designed by politicians who want "results" for their dollars, and by school administrators who believe we can do better. But for good reason it does not have the support of American teachers. When the National Education Association criticized the program last year, Rod Paige, (then) Secretary of Education, called them a "terrorist organization." While the dream is admirable, the plan is fatally flawed. It leaves more children behind than it saves. And it leaves many of this nation's finest teachers ready to walk off their jobs - in tears. Don't be fooled by clever words.

"No Child Left Behind" is the catchphrase for the 2002 extension of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a continuation of President Johnson's War on Poverty. It is a carrot-and-stick measure that ties school funding to a very big shibboleth, "accountability." Continued funding will be granted only to those schools that show "adequate yearly progress" in student test scores. States and counties will be held accountable, and while successful programs will receive increased funding, those that fail to measure up will simply lose federal dollars. The accountability concept in education has been given increasing support by school administrators across the nation, and was elevated to the highest priority in the 1983 education report, "A Nation at Risk." "Accountability" is nothing new.

Accountability seems to make sense. It is the outcome of behavior-modification principles applied to public education. You set goals for the children (or for rats in the little box) and you make them reach those goals. Set one goal today, another tomorrow. This year's sixth-graders will be smarter than last year's sixth-graders. And next year's sixth-graders will be even smarter. And so on for year after year. Thirty Einsteins in every classroom. What could be more educational than that? All the children need is a little negative reinforcement. All their teachers need is a little negative reinforcement. We can make people learn. Punishment works.

B.F. Skinner is laughing in his grave. Are we surprised that the teachers of America hate the plan? But whoever asked the teachers what they thought? That will never happen!

This punitive legislation puts into action a plan to punish those schools and those teachers who "leave children behind." George W. Bush signed into law the "No Child Left Behind" legislation (HR1 of 2001) in January 2002. Since that time, every school in America is under the gun. Educate children or get out of the water. Schools that leave children behind will lose their federal funding. Sounds good. Words can be deceiving.

The legislation had bipartisan support, with Sen. Edward Kennedy leading the charge for Democrats in Congress. The bill passed by a vote of 87-10 in the Senate, and by 384-45 in the House. The legislation was constructed on the foundation of an experiment guided by Rod Paige in Houston in the 1990s. The Houston school system "left no child behind." Or so they claimed.

Now every school system in America must match Houston's success story by the year 2014. By that time, every child in America is expected to pass the reading and math tests. Or else! Vengeance is education.

The legislation recognizes that children from minority families - Latino and African-American families especially - have a harder time passing their exams in our public school system. The dropout rate for city schools - especially those with a high ratio of minority children - ranges from 20 percent to 40 percent, and something had to be done about it. Rod Paige did something. Good idea.

Houston left no child behind. Truly a miracle. Or magic! No dropouts. Year after year. In the Sharpstown High School, the Westside High School, the Wheatley High School, schools that served a student body 88 percent of whom come from minority families, the dropout rate plunged to zero under the guidance of Mr. Paige. Zero. Zip. Under the new Texas plan, not a single student dropped out from September of the freshman year until graduation day four years hence.

For the Houston school system as a whole, the dropout rate was less than 1 percent.

And because of his success in the Houston miracle, George Bush appointed Mr. Paige, Houston superintendent of schools from 1994 to 2001, to serve as Secretary of Education to guide the nation's schools.

No dropouts in Houston. Or so Rod Paige reported. But in February 2002, one month after President Bush signed HR 1 (2001) into law, a local Houston television station, KHOU, following a tip from a school official, reported that the superintendent had falsified the records. Turns out more than 5,000 students quit high school before graduation, and many just disappeared into the woodwork. Starting in 1998 with an enrollment of 13,600 students, only about 8,000 graduated from high school in 2002. More than 5,000 just disappeared. But the principals under Mr. Paige were not allowed to record these students as dropouts. Principals who reported dropouts faced termination. They were forced to sign one-year contracts, and tenure was abolished. Teachers who reported dropouts faced the ax. Under fear for their jobs, they falsified the records.

The low dropout rate was created out of fear. I don't care how you do it, I want zero dropouts, Paige commanded. Zero! It was do or die. The principals of the Houston school district did what they had to do. So what do we learn from this lesson, children? Punishment works. Do what I say or else.

Moreover, the Houston school system reports amazing progress in test scores over the past decade. Under pressure, the school board claims, teachers and principals do what is demanded of them. They educate the uneducable. Of course, the whole thing is one great hoax. Careful testing by outside evaluators has shown that the children of Houston are neither smarter nor better prepared for college than their counterparts in any other city in America. And the Houston teachers complain that they were forced to "teach to the test," a plan detested by most educators in America. The great American plan for improving education was built on a sham.

The No. 1 fallacy with the plan is that it places the blame for poor education on the teachers in our public schools. Never mind that minority students in every city and in every state in America score below their white counterparts. Never mind that children of poverty lag behind the middle-class kids in every county and at every country crossroads in this nation. Never mind the broken homes. Never mind the lack of parental support. Never mind the breakfast the children didn't eat. The fault lies with the teachers. And this fault can only be remedied by replacing all those mediocre and miserable hags with a new corps of "highly qualified" sharpies. Shape up or ship out.

Sounds perfect, doesn't it?

Last year, after Secretary Paige called the NEA a terrorist organization, more than a quarter of a million people signed a petition calling on President Bush to fire Rod Paige. In fact the secretary did resign later that year, but he was replaced with Margaret Spellings, another architect of the NCLB legislation. I have read the "online" angry comments from many West Virginians who signed the petition.

I may be wrong, but I am guessing that the teachers of West Virginia hate this thing, and they are scared to speak up. I am guessing that every principal in this state knows NCLB is based on a hoax, and that cracking a whip is not the way to induce good teaching in the classroom. But we must allow those teachers and those principals to speak for themselves, and to speak freely without fear of reprisal.

I just read a new report from a Northeastern state, a report that presents anonymous responses from teachers afraid to give their names. These are very sad voices. Here are 50-year-old men and women who have dedicated their lives to children of poverty, to minority children, to disadvantaged kids. Here are the men and women who came into their profession under the inspiration of John Kennedy, many who know that their life work is a religious calling, educators who know they have made a difference in the lives of hundreds or thousands of children. Now they are being forced to give more and more tests to make certain their students are "on task."

They lose valuable teaching time just administering those foolish tests required by NCLB. And then they are being told that they are not doing their job, that they are not the "highly qualified" people the system needs.

Please listen to this one teacher's voice. She says, "I think there is an issue of common sense, and we are losing our common sense. It's like we're trying to grow a pretty little flower garden in the desert without understanding how to irrigate it first. We're stepping through gutters of starving people and saying testing them will educate them. We're losing our common sense."

And one last quote. "Lately, the morale has been really low. And we are not getting asked for our opinion. Why, I have a master's degree, I've been teaching. I had a Fulbright scholarship. I'm not an idiot. Ask me my opinion. Don't I count for something?"

I know I speak for many teachers in West Virginia when I say that the "No Child Left Behind" mandate is bankrupt and is destroying our education system and many teachers along with it.

It is a house built on sand.

February 7, 2005

Civil Rights and Elections

When I was a boy, we attended a big white church in Topeka, Kansas. I say "white" not to describe the beautiful Kansas sandstone neo-gothic architecture, but the skin color of the congregation. Church of the Big Wheels of Eastern Kansas.

We were not completely white. My father used to take me down to the boiler room to talk to "Street." Street was the church custodian. You would often see him sweeping floors and cleaning toilets. If he was not immediately visible, you could check the boiler room. Dad liked to talk to Street. I particularly remember that my father asked him one day, "Street, how do you vote?" Street replied with a question, "What party was Lincoln?"

That answer put him in good stead with most of the members of our congregation. They were wall-to-wall Republican. Just like Street - but I suspect for other reasons. Dad loved to argue with Republican members of his adult Sunday school class, the "Homebuilders," much to the embarrassment of my mother. Dad was not a Republican. As I grew up, I began to discover why the big wheels of our small city, and the African-Americans there, voted Republican. This was Topeka, home of Linda Carol Brown, made famous by the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

But the times, they were "a-changin'."

Democrats were the party of the South and of big cities, the party of Catholics and Jews, and of organized labor. Wouldn't feel comfortable in the big white church in Topeka. Last summer, I talked to a woman from Western Kansas. She told me that the few Democrats she knew in her town "didn't amount to nothin'." And I suspect she was right. In Kansas, the folks who count are Republicans.

I have long been fascinated by political parties and voting patterns. In 1966 and 1967, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on voting patterns in Congress.

One of the most powerful patterns in Congress was the quick and ready coalition of Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans, which came to be known as the "Conservative Coalition." Working together, those two groups could block almost any "progressive" legislation and kill any effort to break down racial segregation. Yet the groups were not the same. Among the Southern Democrat tradition, there were such men as J. William Fulbright and Sam Ervin. And there were the Huey Long populists, who could swing the vote to the left or the right. Today, by the way, there is no Conservative Coalition. The South is wall-to-wall Republican. In the newly elected Congress, only four Democratic senators will represent the South.

Since 1928, Democrats have nominated three Roman Catholics for the highest office in the land. They nominated a Jew and a woman for vice president. American Protestants got the point, and decided: "We are not Democrats. We are mainstream. We are white and male-dominant and conservative. Our women stand by their men. We don't need those liberals from back East telling us what to do."

Racism has long plagued the political process. Of course, it was a dividing line during and after the Civil War. Republicans passed three quick amendments to the Constitution after the Civil War, ending slavery, promising equal protection under the law, and giving the vote to former slaves. But there were many ways around those amendments, not the least of which was the Plessey vs. Fergusson decision, which allowed "equal but separate" facilities on public transportation.

By the 1930s, liberals in Congress tried to pass an anti-lynching law to deal with that horrible custom, but even so great a man as Franklin D. Roosevelt was unable to push it through, given the Southern Democrat and conservative Republican cry that such a law violated "states' rights." In fact, that coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats has prevented the passage of an anti-lynching law even up to this day, although the Civil Rights Act of 1968 gave some relief. Today, whatever anti-lynching laws you find on the books belong to states, not the federal government. West Virginia passed one of the first anti-lynching laws back in 1920.

The real watershed came in 1960, when Jim Lawson, Julian Bond, and other young African-Americans began the "sit-in" movement in the South. They were determined to make segregation a national issue and, in doing so, they waited to integrate the stores in downtown Atlanta until a few weeks prior to the elections. They pressured a reluctant Martin Luther King Jr. to join them, and to get himself arrested. Then they called the two presidential candidates, Richard Nixon and John Kennedy, to see how they would respond to the jailing of King. This was the moment when it all got sorted out. Nixon did nothing, not wanting to lose the white vote. It was a close race, and Kennedy took a chance on winning the African-American vote. John Kennedy called Coretta King and promised to do all he could to help her husband. That evening, Robert Kennedy called the judge in Atlanta and told him to get King out of jail. His call was a turning point in American history.

Martin Luther King's father, a man who until that crucial moment in history had always supported "the party of Lincoln," put out a call to his black clergy brethren across the nation, asking them to support Kennedy. The Democrats became the party of civil rights. The rest, as they say, is history.

That was more than 40 years ago. That was a dozen elections ago. And that history is still playing itself out. The other day, I saw a pair of U.S. maps. The first map represented America in 1850. Here the slave states and territories open to slavery were painted red. The second map painted red the states that voted for George W. Bush in 2004. The maps were nearly identical.

Judging from the GOP success record, maybe the only way Democrats could win the next election would be to sponsor legislation to repeal the three great civil rights laws of the 1960s, override Brown vs. Board of Education, and work to get rid of those anti-lynching laws.

March 7, 2005

Lebanon

It's great to know that the forces of freedom and democracy are at work in the tiny nation of Lebanon, and that the Bush administration is supporting U.N. Resolution 1559, which calls for complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. And it is a relief to know that as I write these words Syrian troops are in the process of withdrawal, crossing the border on their way home.

Presumably Syrian troops will be completely out of Lebanon within a few weeks or months. But headlines in the March 15 Gazette give me pause. Not everyone is anxious to see Syria leave town. Demonstrations say otherwise, as pro-Syrian forces tell the United States - not Syria - to butt out.

I hate to sound curmudgeonly, but it just needs to be said somewhere that it is not necessarily going to be clear sailing once Bashar al Assad withdraws his 14,000 troops from that war-torn country.

History is not on the side of peace and freedom in Lebanon. Or to say it more clearly, history does not predict an easy transition from foreign domination to ballot-box government.

In Biblical times, Lebanon was known for the Cedars of Lebanon and for Mount Hermon, a snow-covered peak visible 100 miles in every direction. In modern times, most Americans probably remember Lebanon for its civil war from 1975 to 1990, the Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982, and the Phalangist massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps at Sabra and Shatila. We remember the suicide bombers who took 241 U.S. Marines to their death in October 1983, and President and Nancy Reagan viewing the flag-draped coffins. We remember Lebanon because of Hizbollah and Amal, and because of Terry Anderson and other Americans taken hostage in Beirut.

For those with longer memories, we remember it for the beautiful white sand beaches and the lovely seaside city of Beirut, vacationland for the rich and famous.

Lacking many natural resources, Lebanon became a center of banking, commerce, and tourism. After the recent civil war, we remember the skeletal frames of hotels and shops standing in the rubble and looking very much like Stalingrad or Coventry after World War II.

Like many other Middle Eastern nations, Lebanon comprises several competing ethnic and religious groups, many adherents of which harbor bitter hatreds for one another, in many of whom smolder the raging fires of unforgotten and unforgiven massacres.

Like many peoples of the Middle East, many Lebanese people date their religious heritage to the seventh century and the power of Islamic militants and evangelists. But again like these, Muslims are divided among themselves, first of all between the Sunni majority (traditionalists) and the minority Shiites (partisans and followers of Ali and Hassan). This division also dates back to the seventh century, a conflict over Islamic leadership after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. In Lebanon, as in Iraq, the Shiites have long suffered under the heavy boot of their brother Muslims, the Sunnis. No love is lost between these two branches of Islam.

This is a land where religious belief becomes the defining signature of small communities. The Maronites are a breakaway Christian sect, tracing their origins back to the fifth century. They were excommunicated from the Syrian Orthodox Church because they endorsed the Monophysite doctrine which claims that Jesus was not actually a human being but was God himself only taking on the form of a human being (a pretense). To orthodox Christians, this idea is considered heresy. They took their name after a seventh-century patriarch, John Maron. Maronites look to Israel and the United States for their support.

Today, about 750,000 Maronites live in Lebanon. Other smaller communities of Christians live there, too, including Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Armenians. American Presbyterians staked Lebanon out as their mission assignment and created the American University in Beirut.

The Maronites compete with the Druze for land and power. The Druze, an exotic cult of religionists, live high in the mountains. The Druze date their religious heritage back to an 11th-century Egyptian known as al Hakim, a charismatic Ismaili Muslim who believed himself to be God Almighty, and to a disciple named al Darazi (from whom the Druzes take their name). When these followers of al Hakim were driven out of Egypt, they fled to the mountains of Lebanon and established their claim to what they called Jebel (Mount) Druze. The Druzes and the Maronites have been at each others' throats since that time, most notably in 1860 when a Druze militia massacred some 10,000 Maronites and other Christians. They have fought on different sides even as recently as the civil war between 1975 and 1990.

The Druzes are secretive and eclectic in their theology, affirming the validity of Old Testament prophets, of Jesus and Mohammed, and adopting a Neo-Platonist and Gnostic framework for their beliefs. About 350,000 Druze live in Lebanon, and another 650,000 live elsewhere, particularly in Syria and other Middle Eastern nations.

The birth of the modern state of Lebanon - le Grand Liban - was proclaimed under the French military occupation on September 1, 1920. French control of greater Syria was established earlier that year at a conference at San Remo (on the Italian Riviera). In 1923 the League of Nations formally granted France a mandate to control Lebanon and Syria, with an eye to granting independence when the people were prepared to govern themselves.

Lebanon proclaimed independence from the French on November 22, 1943.

In order to accommodate the competing religious and ethnic communities, an agreement was worked out whereupon representation in government was to be based on the relative size of those religious communities, a so-called "confessional system" of government. Eventually the election of deputies to serve in the legislative branch was based on the 1932 census which showed that the Christians were the largest community, followed by Sunni and then Shiite Muslims.

Thus the president was to be Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni, and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (legislature) a Shiite Muslim. A ratio of six Christians to five Muslims was to serve in that Chamber. In fact those rules have never been strictly followed, and the first president was not a Maronite but a Greek Orthodox Christian. But in 1943 the confessional distribution of offices was reaffirmed under what was known as the National Pact, an unwritten agreement for power sharing.

Significantly there has never been another census taken after 1932 - because the Maronites realize that a new census would reveal that the Muslims now outnumber the Christians, and the Sunni Muslims realize that the Shiites would outnumber them. In order to rectify the changing demographics, the Muslims launched an insurrection in 1958, and the United States sent the Marines into Lebanon to quell the unrest. Which is to say that the interests of the United States are allied with the Maronite community in Lebanon, and not necessarily with the Muslims. The confessional system of government was amended with an arrangement hammered out in Taif, Saudi Arabia, in 1989, an agreement which brought an end to the civil war.

Among the Arabs living in Lebanon are those whose ancestry in the region dates back several hundred years, but many Palestinians fled into Lebanon after they were driven out of their homeland during the Israeli-Palestinian wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. The United Nations Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA) counts some 360,000 Palestinians living in refugee camps in southern Lebanon, while another estimated 200,000 Palestinians live in the Beka'a Valley or in Beirut. Most of the Palestinians are Sunni Muslims.

In the years after the Six Day War of 1967, Yasser Arafat established his PLO fedayeen guerrillas in the villages of Jordan, using them as a base for terrorist attacks into Israel, bringing Israeli reprisal raids back into Jordan. In 1970 King Hussein and his Bedouin warriors drove the PLO out of Jordan, sending them into Southern Lebanon to live, unwelcomed, among the Shiite villages, from which the guerillas continued to harass Israeli communities.

To combat those incursions, Israel sent commando raids into Southern Lebanon in an effort to destroy the PLO. "Collateral damage" was extensive among the Shiite villagers.

In the chaos that followed, all semblance of order collapsed and the tiny nation of Lebanon fell into civil war. In 1976 Syrian forces entered the fray and attempted to quell the turmoil. That was the beginning of Syrian occupation, and it has continued to this day. Israel invaded in 1978, but pulled out when United Nations peacekeepers separated the combatants. Israel returned in 1982 and drove the PLO out of Lebanon, sending Arafat and his organization to Tunisia. At tremendous cost in innocent lives in Southern Lebanon, Beirut, and the surrounding countryside. In all, warfare between 1975 and 1990 killed about 100,000 people.

Since that time, Syria has maintained an unwelcomed military presence in Lebanon, but it must be said that in recent years her presence has presided over a time of relative tranquility. Whether Lebanon will be better off when Syrian troops are withdrawn is a question which remains to be answered. We should not expect a Switzerland of the Middle East to emerge from the ruins of Lebanon.

March 20, 2005

Time to Walk Away

On May 1, 1970, a Friday, several hundred students gathered on the Kent State campus to protest the Vietnam War. They were very angry, and in their violence against property they broke windows in several buildings, causing property destruction estimated at \$5,000. The next day about 2,000 anti-war students gathered at the Kent State ROTC building, an old and rickety structure. Someone torched it, and the students did all they could to prevent police and firefighters from saving the building.

Ohio Gov. James Rhodes, seeking nomination to the U.S. Senate, called the students "the worst type of people we harbor in America ... worse than Communists." Three days later, the Ohio National Guard gathered on the Kent State campus to protect it from the insurgents. That afternoon, the guardsmen began shooting their M-1 rifles into the crowd, and within 13 seconds, 13 students were hit. Four were killed, and at least one was badly injured.

Three days after that, I boarded a plane in Kansas City, flew to Pittsburgh and on to Clarksburg. It was my first visit to West Virginia. I was met at the airport by Dr. Howard Bright, sociology chairman at West Virginia Wesleyan College. That weekend at the Buckhannon school, I met President Stanley Martin and Academic Dean Nelson Hoffman.

On that long-ago Saturday, I watched as members of the Kappa Alpha order donned their Confederate uniforms and paraded their Confederate cannon around the campus. I think it was the Confederate Memorial Day. On Sunday, I heard one of America's finest theologians, author and scholar Martin Marty, preach in the Wesley Chapel. He spoke of the war, of the Kent State massacre, and on the role of a Christian in such times.

The result of my weekend in Buckhannon was that I signed a contract and moved my family to this wonderful town and to this wonderful college community.

For me, the next 35 years have truly been "Almost Heaven." I soon learned that our faculty assembly had been organized very much according to the democratic standards of the American Association of University Professors, a task achieved not long before my arrival by Ken Welliver, Joe Mow, Ben Lantz, Peter Bercowitz, Allen Hamner, and others.

Now I am now finishing my 70th semester at Wesleyan College. This will be my last. I have survived 10 presidents and as many academic deans. I have done my damage to more than 15,000 students at the average rate of more than 400 per year. The numbers were higher in the 1970s, a little lower now. I once taught a class of 146 students in Hyma Auditorium. One of my students was murdered. At least four of my sociology alums are now deceased. Tom Bickerton, a sociology major some 30 years ago, was elected a bishop in 2004. Several serve as United Methodist pastors in this state. Many work in social service agencies in West Virginia and neighboring states. Most of "my" students have gone on to productive careers and happy lives.

In 1975 I worked with Ed Piper and Joe McCoy to create a youth services major, and three of my students created the New Dawn Youth Center, a group home for troubled teens. In the next 10 years, about 120 students graduated with a major in youth services, all of them having spent an urban semester in Detroit or Columbus. Bill Mallory helped me with that urban semester. Gov. Rockefeller appointed me to serve on the state juvenile justice committee.

I am not the only professor planning to retire in the near future. I can count more than 25 others here at this college who will do so in the next five years. Today we are a "gray faculty," but not for long.

I have traveled more than 100,000 miles with 17 student groups, 11 in the western United States and six in Europe or the Middle East. I have spent nearly 52 weeks "on the road" with Wesleyan students. With my students I have raced on the ancient track in Olympia, Greece. We have stood in the Parthenon and felt the power of the great Pericles.

We have walked the paths of Delphi and listened for an oracle there. We have stood in the ancient Dionysian Theatre in Athens where Sophocles and Aeschylus first plied their trade. We have stood in the ruins of Troy and we have seen the Lion Gate at Mycenae. In New Mexico we have stood in the ruins of the Anasazi culture and in the Southwest we have watched a dozen Indian powwows. At least 10 years ago, I began meeting mothers and fathers of entering freshmen, men and women who would ask, "Do you remember me?"

Time for me to walk away. Proudly I will leave the department of sociology in the hands of two "young-timers," Mathew Johnson and Maya Met-tal. There is a passage in the Old Testament, in the first book of Kings, in which the prophet Elijah removes his mantle and places it on the shoulders of the younger prophet Elisha. I like that passage especially in these final days of my career because Maya once told me that her name in Hebrew means "mantle." Well, I too must pass the mantle to a younger generation.

To my friends across this lovely state, I must say that you have made this a wonderful home for me and for my family. We have been very proud to call this our adopted state. We will make this our retirement home, and for as long as we breathe we will never leave you.

Since 1980, the Gazette has published more than 200 of my columns. Thanks to you who have listened to what I have had to say. Not all have agreed with me.

And to my colleagues at this college, I must say that I have been extremely proud to have been a member of this faculty. You have put up with me and accepted me and made me one of your own. For that I am most grateful. Thank you.

Thank you all.

May 16, 2005

Unexpected Friendship

I learned two things from old Doug Taylor, the funeral director in a small town in Maine. I thought I would pass them along.

Many years ago - and today that seems a lifetime - I was a student at Boston University School of Theology. I was preparing for the ministry, although even at that time I knew that my career could go either one of two ways. I might spend my life as a parish minister, preaching at a Methodist church (we were not at that time yet a "United" Methodist Church) every Sunday. Or I might teach at a Methodist college.

As it ended up, I chose the latter, and I am very glad I did.

Between June of 1960 and that same month of 1962 I took a church assignment in Lisbon Falls, Maine. I attended seminary five days of the week, and I served that little Methodist church on the weekends. I did one other thing at about that same time, one thing which has had quite an influence on my life. I got married. In July of 1960 I flew from Logan Airport to Los Angeles - my first commercial flight - and married a woman who has since given me three beautiful children, subsequently six glorious grandchildren, and forty five years of infinite happiness.

We lived those first few weeks of our married life in a little apartment in Lisbon Falls and in September moved into another apartment in Boston, close to the university. Judy was an undergraduate at Boston University, just as I was in the graduate school. From Monday to Friday we attended classes, and on Friday afternoon we packed our bags and drove a little blue Volkswagen "bug" three hours north to a mill town on the Androscoggin River. On Saturdays I visited the sick and the shut-ins. I preached on Sunday mornings and she taught a Sunday school class. On Sunday evenings we guided the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and we drove back to Boston after MYF, usually arriving there just before midnight. Those were hard but happy years.

In the spring of 1962 I wrote to my mother - in Topeka, Kansas - and asked her what she knew of her father's origin.

Mom had told me once that her dad was born in Maine, and now that I was here I thought I would do some family research. She didn't know much, but she found a death notice sent to her dad in 1941, and she mailed it to me. The notice reported that Charles Bailey, my grandfather's cousin, had died. The note was postmarked "Lisbon Falls."

Folks, I figure there are more than one thousand towns in the state of Maine, and here I was, spending summers and weekends in the very hometown of my grandfather's cousin. Truly unbelievable.

The next Sunday after I received that death notice Mr. and Mrs. Doug Taylor took Judy and me out to dinner after church. We drove over to Brunswick and ate at a little lobster place. As we drove, I mentioned the death notice, which I had in my pocket. Frankly it did not even then fully dawn on me that I was speaking to an old funeral director from Lisbon Falls as I mentioned the death notice. I was just making conversation. But of course Doug Taylor immediately wanted to see the notice. He blanched as he told me he had sent that notice to my (then dying) grandfather. It was in his own handwriting. "I buried Charles Bailey, my next door neighbor, in the Hallowell cemetery," Doug told me.

I have to report to you that Judy did not order lobster. She just hates to see those little beady eyes looking up at her. Those eyes don't bother me. So as the three of us ate our marine delicacy, and Judy downed a t-bone steak, our friend Doug Taylor took a napkin and a ball point pen and drew a map of the Hallowell cemetery.

"Turn right at this gate," he showed me, "and follow this arrow. Here is the headstone of Charles Bailey. And on the reverse side of that stone you will find the name Gray" (my mother's maiden name).

That's the first thing I learned from Doug Taylor. I learned one more thing. During those years in Maine I often rode with Doug in the big black hearse. Of course as the Methodist pastor I performed many funerals. I often rode with him to the cemetery where the body was to be buried, and where I was needed to say a few words at the graveside.

So Doug and I talked a lot. Often the burial was in town, but at other times the body had to be delivered to another location, sometimes a couple of hours away. Doug and I had a lot of time to share our thoughts. He was a Republican.

So one time I asked him why he was a Republican. "Because I hate Social Security," he replied. Well, at that time I wasn't worried. We had just elected John Kennedy. The Congress was Democrat and the Supreme Court (the Warren Court) was liberal. But only now do I realize how prophetic those words would become. Those words have become for me the dark cloud on the horizon, about the size of a man's hand.

May 24, 2005

West Virginia Academy of Science

If you live to be 68 and counting, as I have, you will meet a lot of interesting people along the way. When we moved to Buckhannon in the summer of 1970, we settled into an old house on College Avenue.

Across the street from us, Albin and Louise Gilbert occupied an apartment. Albin was world-renowned as a psychologist, a professor at West Virginia Wesleyan College. He and Louise grew up in Czechoslovakia before World War II, and fortunately they escaped the horrors of Europe by fleeing to India and later to the United States.

In her day, Louise had danced with the Isadora Duncan school (with Isadora's sister). If you know anything about dance history, you know Duncan was a forerunner of modern dance. Her women and girls danced a free-movement method wearing gauze and flowing garments, often outdoors. While in India she painted a portrait of the great Hindu poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore sat for her - that's big! Tagore is to India what Shakespeare is to England.

Albin had developed a psychological theory that I call "lie detection." He argued that when asked a question, a person gives a "delayed response" if anxiety is present. He had a little timer that indicated "delayed responses," possible lies. "What were you doing last Saturday night?" the cop asks the robber. The robber hesitates, giving him away. And so forth.

I got to know Albin when I first presented a paper at the annual meeting of the West Virginia Academy of Science at Marshall University in 1972. We drove to Huntington together and took a room in a university dorm. Albin became something of a mentor for me. He used to tell me: "Get off of those committees. Spend your time doing research."

He retired soon after that meeting at Marshall, but continued to live across the street and do research for at least a dozen years before he became too feeble to continue his work. Their daughter, living in Maryland, took them to live with her.

He and Louise are now both deceased.

Albin was very European, of course. I think I never saw him out of the house without a suit and tie - he used to rake the yard wearing one. His colleagues laughed at him because he stood too close when he talked with you.

And he could do nothing with his hands. He used to phone me to come over and replace the ribbon on his old Remington typewriter, and as I did the chore, he sat right beside me and tried to help by sticking his hands into the machine where I was working. "Get those monkey paws out of my way," I used to tease him. And 30 seconds later he had his hands back in, trying to help. Although they were paupers, living in that little apartment, Louise always served a cookie and a cup of tea when I went over. They had Persian carpets on the floor, her artwork on their walls.

All of which is a long way of telling you that I have worked for many years with the West Virginia Academy of Science, serving as its president and as its treasurer in years gone by. For the past 20 years or so, I have served as assistant treasurer, doing some of the thankless chores of handling a few academy dollars. Specifically, my task over those years was to mail invoices to about 60 libraries around the world for our journal, *Proceedings of the West Virginia Academy of Science*, which we publish every year.

Those 60 libraries included universities in Europe, South Africa, Australia, and other foreign lands, and many of the great universities in America. West Virginia University also bought 60 copies of our journal and used them for exchange purposes with other university libraries.

We hold our annual meetings in the many colleges and universities around the state, rotating from year to year.

On April 23, we met at WVU, and two years before that we met at Wesleyan. This is a chance for scientists from 20-some schools to exchange ideas and report on their current research.

Much is focused on our state or region, bringing reports this year on reptiles and amphibians in the Gauley River National Recreation Area, the fall and winter diet of a little creature known as the "fisher," red spruce regeneration in three West Virginia forests, the harvesting of ginseng, soil change effected by surface mining and reclamation, the health or lack thereof of the lakes and streams in our state, and about 75 other such reports. One paper this year discussed quasars and another discussed the so-called native wild flowers we plant along our highways and byways, arguing that many of the flowers are neither native nor are they wild, and some are invasive.

Now I have taken over the task of serving the academy as its new editor. I guess I have fallen in love with the academy, and have immensely enjoyed working with West Virginia professors and scholars. Probably more than half of the members are biologists, and a preponderance of the papers presented at our annual meetings come either from the life sciences or earth sciences. Many of the papers are written by graduate or undergraduate students guided by their professors.

I argued that I was qualified to edit these papers because in 1952 I took a biology class in Topeka High School and I did the frog and the fish worm. Besides, I carry the Peterson Guide books into the woods and I feed the birds and squirrels at our house. I love to watch the stars, the planets, and the occasional comets that visit our region of the Milky Way. And I am a member of Darwin College at Cambridge University - as in the Beagle and the Galapagos Islands Darwin.

That ought to count for something.

July 14, 2005

The Lessons of Katrina

I am trying to make sense of the scenes I have been watching after Katrina visited her wrath on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. How is it possible, in America, to witness that great mass of human misery, knowing that our shallow national leadership just does not get it? But that is what we have been asked to do. We all heard the cries for water and food, and we searched in vain to see helicopters bringing relief. None appeared. Where are the helicopters? we all asked.

The theory of government that gave us the Gulf Coast tragedy is called *laissez faire*. "That government is best which governs least." George Bush and his cronies in Congress and elsewhere have tried to foist this theory onto the American people, and for the past five or six years we have been willing to buy it. We have been willing to believe that "I can go it alone." But that is not true. We are all in this together, and New Orleans taught us that lesson, if we did not know it before.

Let me ask you: In New Orleans, did we need less government, or did we need more? And if you step back in your mind's eye to Logan Airport in Boston, back to the early morning of September 11, 2001, did we need less government or more? Did we need government officials to enforce the rules regarding passengers boarding those ill-fated airplanes, or did we not?

Do we need someone to mind the store, or do we not?

Katrina was a wake-up call. But Katrina has awakened us to much more than hurricane management. It has opened our eyes to the squalor of those who live daily as *les misérables*. And to the failure of *laissez faire* government to deal with that human misery.

Government is not cheap. Good government is expensive. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot have good government at the same time we empty the coffers for tax breaks for the rich. We cannot have good government by giving that \$1.35 trillion back to the 1 percent or 2 percent who dwell at the top.

Our highways cost money. Our bridges and our levees cost billions of dollars. Our schools cost countless dollars. Medical care for our veterans is not cheap. Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid are expensive items in the budget, but they are ever so important for modern and responsible government. And frankly, our illegal and useless war in the Middle East has cost us a very dear penny.

It takes money to feed the five thousand. And to give them to drink. But our president is worried about Trent Lott's vacation home.

And with that, we are a very shamed nation.

Perhaps we cannot prevent hurricanes. What we can do, however, is elect those who will govern us well. And we must therefore choose those who will use our tax dollars responsibly. I wonder what we might have done with the money returned to Trent Lott and his colleagues if we had used it as the Army Corps of Engineers had recommended?

We are all in this together. Remember Lester Maddox, the owner of Pickrick Cafeteria in Atlanta? Maddox was the fellow who wouldn't serve African-Americans in his restaurant, back in the civil rights era, because "a man's home is his castle." So in 1966 the good people of Georgia elected him their governor. But of course a restaurant is not a man's home, and even that home is subject to community control. You may own a house, but you cannot sell crack there, nor can you rent prostitutes. Anyway, Lester Maddox was elected governor of the state of Georgia because he believed he should be allowed to do with his property as he liked.

But property and wealth are social things, just as poverty and squalor are social things. And they give us all a social responsibility to take care of what is ours - ours as a social people. And we all must take responsibility for those whose faces we did not recognize but whose human condition was absolutely intolerable and inexcusable, those whose faces and bodies and soaking wretched clothes we witnessed on our television screens in the days after Katrina. We didn't do that. We answered the age-old question, "am I my brothers' keeper?" very badly.

We answered that question badly long in advance of Katrina. We answered it when we sent a man to the White House who would squander the very resources needed to meet emergencies. We answered it when we returned a man to the White House who cut the budget for levee repairs and who promised to put those much-needed dollars back into the hands of Trent Lott and his cronies, cronies who are blind to the pain and the squalor of les miserables.

Our president claimed that Katrina was an unexpected event. But if there is anything to be learned from history, it is this: Expect the unexpected. History is not smooth. History is one unexpected event after another. And the future will not be faced well when we give our surplus wealth to those who build their vacation homes on the sands of barrier islands in the Gulf of Mexico.

Good government grows out of a recognition that we are all in this together. Bad government grows out of the false belief that "I can go it alone." No. No one is alone in this world, and we've got to do this thing of living by living with one another, by taking responsibility for ourselves and for one another. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and they are ours.

We will all be much relieved when those images of Katrina's aftermath go away. We do not want to see those faces and those dirty and smelly and ill-clothed bodies struggling in squalor, dodging cadavers and alligators and water moccasins, because they remind us of our failures as a social people. And when those images go away, I very much fear that we will work consciously to rid those images from our collective memory. And we must not let that happen.

We must learn from our stories.

Perhaps we had no control over the weather. But that may not be true. Global warming is a real issue, and the verdict is not yet in. But we will not help ourselves with euphemisms. We will not help ourselves by calling global warming "climate change." The term "global warming" implies responsibility. The term "climate change" suggests none.

But we did have control over public management. We could have built those dikes so they would not have given way. But that involves a better theory of government, a theory of our responsibility for one another. We must learn today from our very shameful failure to learn in days gone by.

September 19, 2005

Gun Stories

I am not completely proud of my life with a rifle. I don't think I have held a gun in my hands for about 30 years, but I confess that I do have a J.C. Higgins model .22-caliber rifle hiding in a closet, and that I hang a marksman badge with five bars up alongside my other Boy Scout awards.

I am not very happy either with the fact that I started wearing hearing aids a few days ago, and although those little machines do help me hear a little better, I am too vain to enjoy them. It is no fun to put the little buggers into my ears, and it hurts sometimes to take them out.

And what does that have to do with my rifle? Well, I am convinced that the hearing-aid people are major investors in such companies as Colt, Winchester and Remington. That is to say, I am convinced that my days as an assistant on the rifle range at the Boy Scout Camp Jayhawk near Ozawkie, Kansas, did some of the damage that causes me to wear my new hearing aids.

Anyway, I don't think I really need hearing aids. I just wish all the people around me would quit mumbling. Students in my classes mumble. Members of my Sunday school class mumble. Our preacher mumbles. My wife mumbles. My grandchildren mumble. If they would speak clearly and pronounce words properly, I would not have gone to that audiologist.

As I said, I am not completely proud of my life with a rifle, and perhaps a little confession is good for the soul. I did shoot a squirrel once, fair and square. He was up in one of the walnut trees out on Grandfather Gray's wonderful farm. I ate the squirrel for supper, by the way.

I bagged a raccoon once, but I cannot brag much on that one. Uncle Bill and Aunt Treva took over my grandfather's farm once Grandpa Gray became too old to milk the cows and drive the tractor. Bill and Treva raised white collies, a breed of dog now not much sold in America, but back then they raised the collies and shipped them all over the country.

My brother Don and I loved Rex and Jane, the mom and pop collies, and we loved to walk out in the pasture of an evening with the two dogs and drive the milk cows in to the barn.

Bill also liked the dogs because they kept coons out of the corn crib, and from time to time the dogs got into a fight with the coons. The two dogs could kill a coon in a ground fight, but if the coon could draw a dog into a farm pond, the odds were reversed. Especially one-on-one. So one afternoon while we were visiting the farm we heard a terrible commotion out in the pasture, and sure enough the dogs had treed a raccoon.

Eventually, the coon came down and scampered over to the pond where he had his nest. The coon got into the nest and the dog went in after him. Terrible face-to-face combat. Nose to nose. Tooth to tooth. While Dad and Bill pulled away the brush, I put the barrel of my J.C. Higgins down on the coon's head and pulled the trigger.

I used a taxidermy merit badge book to stuff that coon, and I put a glass marble in each eye. That was the biggest creature I ever shot with my Sears and Roebuck weapon, but I confess that I once shot my cousin Ted in the heel with my BB gun, a small accident that considerably irritated Ted. He had his shoes on, for crying out loud. And Don and I shot about a hundred frogs in one of those farm ponds once. Not to eat. Just for the fun of it. Well, give a boy a gun. As I say, nothing to brag about.

Later that same day after I shot the coon, Don went out with Dad, the white collies, and the rifle and shot into a squirrel's nest. Out came another coon, and down it crashed to the earth below. I will let Don tell the rest of the story. I quote his words below.

"The raccoon was covered with blood, but nowhere close to giving up. All of a sudden, I was overwhelmed with a profound realization, for the first time in my life, of the real difference between life and death, and of how much all living creatures want to live. I wished more than anything in the world I could take my shots back and let the raccoon live, or that perhaps we could somehow still let the raccoon live despite my shots.

"But I knew it was too late. One way or another, this creature I now greatly admired was going to die before my very eyes because of what I had done. I was going to witness the death of a living creature who very much wanted to live and who would have continued living quite peacefully that day if not for me."

October 17, 2005

Bedtime Stories

I confess we held a slight advantage when it came to bedtime stories. Judy's mom earned her master's degree in children's literature at Columbia University, and it was she who provided our children with the latest Caldecott and Newbery award books. Christmas and birthday presents were always those books. She also sent us a few boxes of discards from the Pasadena library where she worked after a career as a Methodist missionary to India.

I must add here that she obtained those volumes by a devious slight of hand. The books discarded by the Pasadena library were thrown into the dustbin and destined for the local incinerator. Fahrenheit 451 for those Newbery and Caldecotts. Elinor Ebright, law-abiding citizen and retired missionary, could not abide sending those precious stories to the realm of ashes and cinders. Dumpster diver Elinor rescued the treasures and boxed them for West Virginia. I loved to tease my mother-in-law, threatening to report the theft. She replied with her own mischief. Are we harboring the stolen goods? she asked.

So, as you can imagine, we had the finest in children's literature to read to our children. The Caldecott Award was given by the American Library Association every year, beginning in 1938, for the best illustrations in children's literature. The Newbery Award was given by the same organization for the best story, beginning in 1921. Of course, living in Boston, we loved to read Robert McCloskey's "Make Way for Ducklings," a story now memorialized with a beautiful sculpture in the Boston Public Garden. Our children loved Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" and Beni Montresor's "May I Bring A Friend?"

We read "Little House on the Prairie," "Charlotte's Web," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and the like every night of their childhood lives. We read "Madeline" and "Burt Dow" and "Sing Down the Moon" and "The Cricket in Times Square." And of course from that came a total lifetime love of literature. Today our 10-year-old granddaughter, Jackie Warner, in Philadelphia, is just now finishing volume five of the Harry Potter series. Thank you, J.K. Rowling.

But now we have a new twist. In Philadelphia we read such literature to our grandchildren, and when they join us in Buckhannon for "Camp Nani and Nana," we pull out the tattered books from the family library shelves. But one night I asked the three little Warner kids if they would like to hear a story about their own father, and they answered enthusiastically. Thus began a new series which we call the "Daddy Stories." And once we got that one started, Judy began writing her own version of Daddy stories and printing them for the grandchildren, adding pictures from our giant collection of family photos just to spice things up a bit.

So here we tell of "The Birth of Peter," and how we drove from Maine to California in a little VW "beetle" when Judy was well into her eighth month of pregnancy - so she could be with her mother when Peter came. Here is the story of Peter the night he put his little fingers into a bed of campfire ashes - cold on top and aflame below. Here is Peter catching a lyre snake in California and later a desert boa, or an evening in Illinois when Peter caught himself with a treble fish hook. We tell the tale of the five-story tree house, commemorated by Jennifer Roth from the fifth story, a live interview published on National Public Radio.

Here is the story of swimming lessons, and the big leap from a three-meter diving board in Emporia, Kansas. We tell of camping at Audra State Park, a ski trip to Snowshoe when the temperature dipped below zero degrees Fahrenheit. Here is the story of Peter learning to play his trombone.

I tell you this, dear Gazette reader, because I believe each one of you who loves to read bedtime stories to your own children and grandchildren has a wealth of knowledge stored up in the precious memories of days gone by, and just as our grandchildren love to hear the tales of their father when he was a child, your little ones too will revel in their own family tales.

October 27, 2005

Dirty Laundry

It bothers me when Lou Dobbs tells us that George Bush has now created a bigger national debt for my grandchildren to repay than all of the last 42 American presidents combined. It bothers me that a lot of that money has been borrowed from China.

And I am not too happy about the Republican plan to cut Medicaid payments for our poorest citizens. Nor am I very thrilled to know that Bush and his right-wing compatriots are pushing to extend the tax break for the opulent. We borrow from China to pay the rich!

But none of these things irritate me as much as the fact that Pat Robertson and his so-called "Christian" lemmings told us all that voting for George W. was the only thing a good Christian could do. That one irritates me a lot.

I'm not too happy either about the Great Lie they sold us - the weapons of mass destruction lie that Condoleezza, Dick, Don, and George used to get us into a war which we can never win, a war which has cost us more than 2,000 American lives and perhaps as many as 100,000 Iraqi lives.

But the Great Lie does not bother me as much as the great hordes of "Christian" followers who wave the born-again flag in our faces and cheer for America's wonderful go-it-alone role on Planet Earth.

"Brother, have you been saved? Good! Then you'll want to support the war, privatize Social Security, expand the Panama Canal, endorse No Child Left Behind, destroy the social safety net, and put all those homosexuals out of the church. Vote your values, dear friend."

You might know that a great battle now rages within the United Methodist Church. Earlier this year, a United Methodist pastor told a man he could not join our church because he was a homosexual. We don't want no homos in our congregation, he told him. Well, I can tell you that one splits our church right down the middle.

The decision is a deep violation of the United Methodist policy and tradition, a violation of our social creed, and the next step in the widening gulf that separates the right from the left within our holy walls.

It didn't end there, friends. Our church has a mechanism for solving such disputes. We have an elected Judicial Council, a forum of wise Christian elders who listen and resolve. When taken to that "supreme court" of our church, the Judicial Council ruled - Decision 1032 - in favor of the pastor. The ordained clergy have now been given the "Keys to the Kingdom," according to the Judicial Council. Clergy have the right to admit and deny membership in the Body of Christ. "We don't want no homos!"

Doesn't that make you proud?

But, as I said, it ain't over yet. Thank heaven (literally), our Council of Bishops met in our retreat center at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, and, on November 2, voted unanimously to send a message to the local U.M. churches across America - condemning the decision made by the Judicial Council. We are an inclusive church. At the request of Bishop Ernest Lyght, many U.M. pastors in West Virginia read the bishop council's message on the first Sunday in November, and many others will do so in coming weeks. But many others did not and will not.

Of course, this is dirty laundry, and I do not doubt that many within our church want to keep it in the closet. But while we might try to hide the dirt, the smell won't go away.

Throughout the 20th century, many Protestant churches participated in the great ecumenical movement, an attempt to mend the divisions that had severed the Body of Christ. The 19th century witnessed a series of breaks within our church. By the end of that century, we were the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, the Methodist Protestant Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and several others. The issues in that century were slavery, racism, and lay participation.

So, in the past century, we began to heal the wounds. Three of those churches reunited in 1939, and we Methodists joined with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968. Now we are United Methodists.

But those days are long gone, friends. We are separating ourselves again, and there seems to be no stopping it. With voices like Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and the born-again movement calling from the right, we are redividing ourselves - this time, over political and theological ideologies, left and right politics, left and right religion. We are dividing over evolution and science versus religion, over sexual orientation, over nationalism versus internationalism, over the role of women in the home and in the church, over abortion, prayer in the public schools, the First Amendment, over the legitimacy of the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, over the right to wage a war against people who do not think as we do.

In 1960, Episcopal Bishop James Pike invited the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, a high-ranking Presbyterian minister, to preach a sermon at San Francisco's Grace Episcopal Cathedral. Blake's sermon called for Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians to join in one great united church. That led to what we called COCU, the Council on Church Union. It was based on Jesus' hope that "they all may be one." That dream never came true, and that year was the high-water mark for church union.

I fear that the year 2005, marked by the ruling of the U.M. Judicial Council and the unanimous response by our bishops, will be a significant marker for church division, and this will be the real beginning of a breakdown of the Body of Christ.

November 11, 2005

Measuring Time

I listened to "Car Talk" on Public Radio the other day. I like Tom and Ray Magliozzi because they are funny and because they are Red Sox fans. And Judy and I used to live where we could hear the home runs Ted Williams smacked over the big Green Monster at Fenway Park. They were talking about "road rage." Someone had argued that Italians do not experience road rage, and wondered why we do and they don't. The answer: Italians take time to smell the roses, and we don't.

Of course there were lots of platitudes about how we are all driven by time, how we always feel pinched for time, how we are always in a hurry, how we all have high blood pressure because we can't relax, and all that. And I got to thinking. I have a very different opinion about why we are always in a rush.

First of all, we are not always in a rush. But we are sometimes. One very good reason for rushing is that being on time is an act of courtesy, and being late is an offense to other people. If two of us agree to meet at 10 o'clock this morning, and one of us is late, the other person is left holding a bag of wasted minutes. Say what you will, being on time is the courteous and responsible thing to do, and being late is - to my way of thinking - a serious offense. It means that you do not think the other person's time is valuable enough for you to meet your obligation. So the people who drive carelessly and make us late for our appointments often make us mad. Sometimes really mad. The genesis of road rage.

And then I got to thinking about time itself. Of course to do that we all have to pick up Stephen Hawking's "A Short History of Time." Which I did, but confess that some of the sentences were a bit over my head.

But let's start there. We know now, if we do not listen too carefully to Pat Robertson and his lemmings, that the universe is about 15 billion years old, and that it all started from a spark of energy/matter that exploded in all directions, that hydrogen, helium, and lithium were all created in the first moments of time, and that Planet Earth and her sisters are all about 4.6 billion years old.

We also know that little creatures got up and walked from one mud puddle to another a very long time ago, and that this one short trek started us all off in the direction of becoming human.

But I have another kind of "time" in mind, namely "measured time." Somewhere in the distant past - but relatively speaking that past is not so distant - an astronomer in Persia, most likely, figured out that he/she could measure time by observing the heavens. He/she figured that by using shadow sticks one could observe the shortest and longest days of the year, and predict such days in years to come. And by using those shadow sticks, that early stargazer started telling the farmers in his/her bailiwick when to plant their corn and their barley. The calendar became power.

Probably another astronomer decided to organize the days into weeks, and looking at the sky he/she called the days Sun-day, Moon-Day, Zeus-Day, etc., and voila, we had a very nice collection of seven days that we called the week. Then these wizards organized time into Moon-ths, and time was measured coming and going.

I have long been impressed with the quatrains of Omar Khayyam. While the Rubaiyat is seldom read in school these days, it was once a staple of the high school literature curriculum.

Omar Khayyam was born in the latter years of the 11th century A.D., but he was better known in his own day as a mathematician and an astronomer. He was famous among his contemporaries for measuring the length of the astronomical year, which he claimed was exactly 365.24219858156 days in length. He missed it just a bit. Today we know that the year is actually 365.242244 days long. I thought Omar was just pretty darned close on that one.

Anyway, these are the days when we break out the new 2006 calendars. Judy and I are the creators of the Ebright family calendar, the calendar we have been making every winter for the past 20 years or so, and that design has evolved along with technological change. "Intelligent design," we call it.

Ebright is Judy's and her three sisters' "maiden" (I know, "anachronism"!) name, and within that group of four women, their husbands, their children and grandchildren, we now have to record the birthdays for some 55 family members as well as 15 wedding anniversaries. The family calendar has days and weeks, birthdays and anniversaries, printed on the lower page, and family photos on the top. Judy has the photo page all worked out. Each of the four families will be represented at least once every month. Anyone who has a birthday in December, for instance, will also appear on the photo collage above the days and the weeks. Then she has to be certain that every one of those 55 cousins and uncles has at least one photo somewhere among the 12 months.

I can promise you this is a controversial task, and I do not recommend it for the faint of heart. The first thing Becky does when she gets her copy is to count how many times her face appears, and then count how many times Jennifer appears. "Jennifer was in the calendar four times, and you only put me in three times." And because Craig once figured that the Warner faces appeared more times than the Leitnaker faces, he has started calling it the "Warner family calendar." Not to mention that in the more than 6,000 days since we began this enterprise Mr. Leitnaker has never once sent a photo of his own children or his handsome wife. That's not his problem! But these are only the minor charges. Just you wait for this one. "You made me look fat in this picture." And "Why in the world did you pick the very worst photo of me to put on the cover, of all things." This is not for the faint of heart.

Yet it is a fun adventure, and Judy and I get a fine kick out of our annual chore. And although we can claim it was an accident that we put in a "fat" photo of Janet this year, you never know. It might be our sweet and subtle way of paying her back for some misdemeanor she committed last January. Calendar is power.

December 19, 2005

Family and Faith

Our daughter Jennifer and her husband, Steve, recently celebrated their one-year wedding anniversary. They were married by an Orthodox rabbi in a beautiful Jewish ceremony in Cleveland. They are a very happy couple. In preparing for the wedding, Jennifer worked hard to learn the instructions for a Jewish wife, and she has joined the Orthodox community. Moreover, that community and that family have welcomed Judy and me with open arms. They have made us feel part of the family and community.

At one of the prenuptial parties, I, as father of the bride-to-be, was asked to say a few words into the microphone. I told the Fishman family and all their friends that this was a rare privilege for Judy and me to become a welcomed part of their community, and that we intended to participate in their ceremonies.

And we have kept that promise.

After the wedding, we attended the reception in the ballroom at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland. I danced with the new bride. Judy danced with the new groom. Again I was asked to speak into the microphone, but this time I was to say a beautiful Hebrew prayer, which begins "Barach Atah Adonai." It is a prayer of praise to the one eternal God. It is a prayer the young Jesus said as He grew up in a land far away. And Jennifer was becoming a member of the religious faith to which Jesus belonged.

But as I struggled with those Hebrew words, I knew that another task lay ahead of me. For at Boston University School of Theology long ago, I had studied Biblical Hebrew, and now as we were joining our hearts with this new family and community, I knew that it was time to pull out my old lesson books and relearn the language using the original script.

So now I am at least able to pronounce the words of that prayer using the original script, not the transliteration. And I am relearning to read the script as Jesus read it when He spoke in the synagogue.

Last April, Judy and I drove up to Cleveland for the Passover Feast. Later in the spring, we attended the Bat Mitzvah for one of Jennifer's new nieces. And in October, we attended services for Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.

I tell you this in order to raise an important question.

Do you imagine, dear reader, that Judy and I believe, or have ever believed for even one second, that we have lost a daughter to the Jewish faith?

If you harbor such thoughts, you know us not at all.

But I must hold this story up before the basic doctrines of our church. I hold this story up before the doctrine of exclusion, that only those who have been "born again" will become members of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I present this story as I consider the growing political power of the right-hand side of the Christian community, the fellows who ask you, "Have you been born again, brother?" and then announce that if so you will surely want to support the war effort our "born-again" Christian president so proudly champions. And you will surely want to help Congress deliver that trillion-dollar gift to the wealthy 1 percent or 2 percent of our affluent society.

And you will want to do all you can to destroy Social Security, and to reduce financial aid to our struggling university students, and take away Medicaid support for the poorest of our people. You will naturally want to take pride in the new Medicare law, written entirely for the benefit of drug companies.

You will want to support the torture we impose on prisoners of war. And you will want to cheer him on as our president plunges our nation into a debt so deep that we face a "financial holocaust," as more than one economist describes our economic fate, borrowing from China to pay our most opulent citizens.

And yet these "born-again" Christians - whose unconscionable political and social "values" reflect nothing of the teachings of Christ and refute the biblical injunction to seek "justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God" - will be the first to tell me that the Jewish community to which my daughter has bound herself will be excluded from the Kingdom in the Final Days.

In 1943, a Nazi physician by the name of Josef Mengele was assigned to the death camp at Auschwitz, Poland. His task was to stand at the train station and send the disembarking Jews to the left or to the right. He was nicknamed Todesengel, or Death Angel, by inmates at the camp.

I wonder: All of you "born-again" Christians who believe in that shibboleth as the ticket to heaven - will you send my daughter to the left or to the right?

December 29, 2005

Becoming a Democrat

David Walker, comptroller general of our federal government, says we are facing a "demographic tsunami" from which we will never recover. Folks, those are strong words, and Walker is trying to wake us up from an economic daydream. We are living the 1920s again, he implies, dancing the Charleston while Rome burns.

Sometimes it is hard to maintain a friendship with someone with whom you totally disagree, especially if the disagreement is over politics. For that reason, many people refuse to discuss politics - or religion, for that matter. But about once a week I run into Frank Williams, retired coal mine owner, former member of the West Virginia Wesleyan Board of Trustees, and onetime student in one of my classes.

Somehow Frank and I have been able to maintain a good friendship in spite of our differences.

Every time I write an essay for the Gazette, Frank tells me it made his blood boil. He thanks me anyway, because he says he needs to get his blood boiling every once in a while. Last time, he called to tell me he agreed with me 100 percent regarding the relationship between Christians and Jews, and my hatred of the exclusionary principle within Christian doctrine. But he was disappointed to see how I had twisted that essay into a political critique of the right-hand side of American politics. "I wish you would try, just for once, to see things from the opposite point of view," he begged.

I try. I try. But it always comes out the same. I look over there and see a political party guided just about 100 percent by the interests of great wealthy industrialists, investors, bankers, and those fortunate sons and daughters of opulence - men and women who inherited every cent they ever spent. And the interests of those good folks are not the same as the interests of those of us who live below that upper 1 percent or 2 percent of opulence.

Want to know when I really became a Democrat?

It was in 1964. It was in Laurel, Mississippi, when I drove my little blue Volkswagen down from Maine to Mississippi to participate in the civil rights "Freedom Summer" for the two weeks of my vacation. By the end of those two weeks, it dawned on me, there were no Republicans among the equality volunteers. It's not that we all announced ourselves by party affiliation. It was just one of those unspoken things that comes out in evening conversations and words said in the car while we drove to the next Freedom School.

And then, when I glanced back on the events of the summer before, in August 1963, when I reflected on my walk down Pennsylvania Avenue behind Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Julian Bond, and A. Philip Randolph, it came to me again. Where are the Republicans?

They were absent. They were felt in a powerful way by their overwhelming absence. Civil rights was not their thing. And today when I hear this or that Republican telling all the world that the Republican Party has changed, and that those old racist days are over, I think of the overwhelming attack they are currently making against the poor, those who, frankly, are middle class, those who are working and struggling to make ends meet. They haven't changed one bit.

Trying to respond to Frank's request to see things from the other side, I can honestly say I do see things from that side, and it makes me sick. The great so-called Republican attempt to balance the budget by borrowing from China in order to send several trillion dollars up to the richest people in America while cutting funds for Medicaid and for public education and for higher education scholarships and the cuts Republicans have made in most of the social services - those political actions just make me sick. What is good about that?

Yesterday, Paul Richter and I delivered Meals on Wheels to about 20 homes in Upshur County. I ring the bell and meet a little old lady in a housecoat or an unshaven fellow in sweatpants and naked top, and I feel the 80-degree heat of those substandard homes. "Bless you," they say as I set the meager victuals down on the coffee table and pet the little dog.

Yesterday, I was telling Paul about the prediction David Walker makes: The aging Baby Boom generation begins to turn 60 this year. The first wave of the Boomers are the babies born in 1946, just nine months after the end of World War II. Who will pay their Social Security and Medicare claims? Walker asks.

To which Paul quipped that perhaps those who opposed Roosevelt's Social Security plan may have been correct in the first place. But I don't agree. I know that Frank Williams thinks the whole Social Security plan was built on a house of cards, and to some extent I can see his logic.

But that isn't it. It is not because the younger generation - growing smaller - must pay for the geriatric generation - growing larger. It's because the current Republican Congress and Republican president threw away the very nice budget surplus they inherited from the Clinton administration.

And there are those, growing in number now, who believe that this evaporation of surplus and the effort to sink us into irretrievable debt was a purposeful Republican plan to destroy the entire social service infrastructure created by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And I am inclined to join that cynical and growing number.

I write these words as our little county in West Virginia weeps for our great loss in the Sago Mine.

And I ask again, am I my brother's (and sister's) keeper?

January 9, 2006

Deregulation and Disaster

Surprise, surprise. Gazette journalist Ken Ward Jr., investigating the Sago mine disaster, discovered that regulations set by the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration - that body created in 1969 by the strong congressional leadership of Ken Hechler - have quietly been scuttled by our good "Christian" president, George Bush, Republican.

Under the banner of deregulation, this Republican administration has repeatedly attacked the rules which govern our mines and our industries, calling them "Gestapo" guidelines, and has invested its trust in the interests of those who own our mines, our industries, our workplaces. The Sago mine was a safe place to work, says mine owner Ben Hatfield.

I remember a line from "War and Peace." The peasants, trying to eke out a meager living on the Russian steppes, completely adored the Russian Czar. The czar was God's representative on Earth, assigned by the Great Almighty to serve as the loving father to the Russian people. The peasants were starving, suffering from disease, fatigue, and from the cold Siberian winds. Oh, if the czar only knew how we suffer. To which Tolstoy notes, the czar knew only too well. And he cared not a whit. Remind you of someone? Remind you of New Orleans? Remind you of the body armor our soldiers in Iraq are supposed to wear? Remind you of Sago?

Nobody likes rules. Nothing sounds nicer than "deregulation." So what do you think? On September 11, 2001, we had hundreds of rules for airport safety. But they were not enforced. Security guards at Logan and Dulles Airports approved the passage of Mohammad Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi, and 17 other members of al-Qaida and friends of Osama bin Laden.

This is what is meant by the simple term "deregulation." Don't make us wear seat belts. Don't make us wear motorcycle helmets. Don't set speed limits. And don't make the coal mines observe safety rules, either. Let us smoke where we want. And hunt when we want. And burn our autumn leaves when and where we want.

Deregulation is a catchword spoken by GOP legislators when they want to lighten up on the rules protecting workers and consumers of American industry, commerce, and transportation. "That government is best which governs least," comes the voice from the political right. Don't tell us how to run the Sago Mine. Don't tell us how to build the Pinto, comes the voice of the Ford Motor Company. Don't tell us about coal dust and black lung. Those dirty black lungs come from smoking too much, not from coal dust.

Don't tell us how to build a dam, comes the voice of coal from Buffalo Creek. Don't tell us how to dig coal, comes a voice from Farmington. Don't tell us how to run an airline, comes a voice from Logan Airport. Don't tell us how to handle chemicals, comes a voice from Bhopal. And don't tell us how to raise money for political campaigns, comes a voice from Republican House members working with majority leader Tom DeLay - including Shelley Moore Capito.

I often complain that Republicans represent the rich and the very rich. One of my friends pointed out that many Democrats are wealthy, too. "Take Jay Rockefeller or Edward Kennedy, for instance," he says. That misses the point. I do not complain that there are rich people in the world. I complain that Republicans devote their entire legislative lives to the enhancement of the rich at the expense of the poor. The Kennedys and the Rockefellers have been responsible stewards, and in Congress they represent those of us who are not as well off as they. And there are many like them. Not so in the Republican Party.

Our GOP government is no friend of the middle class. No friend of the poor. The Republican Party has never in my lifetime been a friend of the common fellow. Let us step back about 40 years. Medicare came into being under Lyndon Johnson in 1965.

You could peruse the voting records year after year and find only that same thing. The interests of the Republican Party are with the rich, not the middle class or the poor. It is no surprise that our dear "Christian" President whittled away the safeguards those miners needed in Sago. He's a Republican. What do you expect?

I say this because I study voting records in Congress. It is no aberration of Republican ideology that Bush relaxes the rules for coal mine safety. If you work for a living, the Republican Party is not your friend.

I add a footnote: Gov. Joe Manchin, planning a really exciting evening watching the West Virginia University Mountaineers defeat the Georgia Bulldogs, returned immediately to West Virginia and to the Sago Baptist Church in our brokenhearted little county. He and Mrs. Manchin spent hour after hour with the families of the 13 coal miners - during and after the crisis.

Like the Russian czar, Gov. Manchin knew only too well how these families suffered. But unlike that czar, our governor and his wife came to share their suffering with them. Thanks, Joe. Thanks, Gayle.

February 2, 2006

The Muhammad Cartoons

Like most Americans, I am shocked at the rage in the Middle East - rage over cartoons published several months ago in a newspaper in Denmark.

Life in the Middle East is hard and cruel. Poverty is endemic and ubiquitous. Education is almost universally absent. For one thing, literacy rates among Islamic societies are among the lowest in the world. Moreover, the term "literacy" is very loosely used. It might mean as little as the ability to write one's name or to recognize letters or numbers. And to push the point just a bit, the literacy rates are always higher for men than for women.

But let us speak of those who are fully learned in the Islamic world. Many of these have been taught in the Islamic "madrasahs," what we would call parochial schools, almost exclusively for boys, not girls. What is the curriculum there? The madrasah offers two types. In the hifz, the task is to memorize the Quran. One who has memorized perfectly all 114 Suras is respectfully known as "hafiz." The other Quranic curriculum, alim, requires a knowledge of Arabic, the interpretation of the Quran, the Sharia Islamic law, the teachings of the Prophet, Mantiq (logic), and Islamic history. That's it. Only rarely do the madrasahs offer courses in world history or foreign languages.

Do you notice anything missing? Completely absent is the dream of an inquisitive mind. Where is education?

The words of Mohammad, given to him by the Angel Gabriel, are written calligraphically by the great scholars of the faith. These are adequate for a life well lived, the schools say. They teach the child the five pillars of Islam: to worship the one true god (Allah), and to recognize his one great messenger (Mohammad); to face the Kaba'a Stone and pray to the one great god five times each day; to give alms, which means to help the poor; to fast from dawn till dusk each day through Ramadan; and to make the one great journey, the hajj, to Mecca, and to circle the sacred stone seven times.

And I, from another faith and another perspective - who also interpret my own life as a pilgrimage in a land far from my eternal home - must confess that these five pillars provide a beautiful plan for living the life of a pilgrim. One who lives by such a faith and obediently observes the pillars of Islam will surely discover a lasting peace and eternal joy. From my own perspective, however, this is not an education.

Living among these five great pillars is adequate for those on a desert island. Such learning fails to prepare the pilgrim to meet the challenging struggles of life on Planet Earth. For here, in the daily grind of survival and the effort to feed a family, the five pillars fall somewhat short.

And we witness it, I fear, in the incomprehensible rage of those who have taken to the streets and responded so badly to cartoons that appeared more than 100 days ago in a Danish newspaper. Of course they were offended. But the response is self-indicting.

OK, I confess that, in my short stay in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, I met many very brilliant men and women. We visited four fine universities, including their military college. We watched open-heart surgery in the hospital theater in Amman. But we also heard several very bright national leaders refer to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion as if they were accurate and legitimate.

And even today, we hear Islamic leaders insist that the Jewish Holocaust was a hoax. Such words reveal a serious lack of education by the brightest scholars.

David Brooks of The New York Times said it better than I can: "The difference between your faith and mine is that I have also learned from one who walked the streets of Athens 2,300 years ago and who taught me to survive in the agora of countless opinions - opinions not my own, opinions with which I terribly disagree. I have adopted, in addition to my own Christian faith, the life of an open mind, and you in the Islamic world have not. I can say to you that I respect your faith and I know that you will do well by it. You cannot say that to me, because you did not learn to live in the agora."

I have learned to live with the struggle of public opinion, because from time to time, ideas with which I most disagree turn out to be better than the ones to which I cling. I have never threatened to kill people who disagree with me, and it seems to me that there is just a drop of virtue in that.

In addition to living in the agora, we in the West have come upon the scientific method in our search for truth, a method which helps us live a better life, to cure nasty diseases, to build rocket ships and skyscrapers, to penetrate the atom, and to see beyond the stars, but which absolutely requires that our scientists offer their new ideas to the wolves and hounds of competing ideas and to critics determined to prove them wrong. In the struggle of the scientific community, the best ideas tend to emerge and survive and mature and help us build a better world. That is not possible in the classroom of the madrassah. In the madrassah, education will not happen, nor will science flourish. Memorizing the Quran is not enough. And I ask you not to kill me or demonize me for telling you that.

To this, I must add that the Danish cartoons carried just a small bit of truth. There are many in the West who will say that, while the cartoons were tasteless and inappropriate, it is correct to suggest, with word or sketch, that the name of Allah and his Prophet have often been invoked as a justification for violence. In fact, from my very limited perspective, suicide bombing, kidnapping, and beheading innocent victims in the name of Allah is itself tasteless. And the thing that protesters find most irritating is that the cartoon carries that drop of truth.

One thing more: We have more than our share of closed minds in the West, as well, and these are responsible for much that is wrong and foolish. The Middle East is not alone in this. I saw a bumper sticker the other day with which I will end this comment. "A closed mind is a wonderful thing to lose." So be it.

February 17, 2006

Ancient Hatred

Although he had four (or more) wives, the Prophet Muhammad had no surviving sons. As it turns out, that was tragic for the future history of Islam. The furor over who should pick up his mantle after Muhammad died has never ended, as seen by the February 22 bombing of the Askariya Shiite mosque in Samarra, Iraq.

Some say that golden dome was to Shiite Muslims what the Dome of the Rock is to Sunnis, what the dome of St. Peter's is to Catholics, what the dome of the U.S. Capitol is to Americans, what the onion domes of St. Basil are to Russians.

The question of Islamic succession was never resolved, and the threat of civil war in Iraq today is just one more phase of the ongoing struggle between minority Shiites and majority Sunnis in the world of Islam.

The threat is wider than the borders of Iraq.

In the year 632 CE, one group of Muslims thought the successor, the khalifa or caliph, should follow the bloodline of the prophet, and since there was no male issue, they chose Ali ibn Abu Talib, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Ali was the husband of Fatima, Muhammad's daughter. Those who wanted leadership to follow the bloodline are known as the Shiites.

Others of the faithful supported the election of Abu Bakr, a respected merchant in Mecca and an owner of camels, the father of Muhammad's third wife, Aisha. Abu Bakr was a close companion of the prophet. He had accompanied and protected him when he fled from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina today), a flight known as the Hijra.

Leaders of the Islamic community, the Ulema, chose Abu Bakr rather than Ali to be the first caliph, much to the disappointment of Ali's supporters. And while it could be said that Abu Bakr was close to the prophet, it was Ali who cared for Muhammad in his final days, washing his body as his life eked out.

After the natural death of Abu Bakr, the next two caliphs were assassinated, and Ali ibn Abu Talib was finally chosen to be the fourth caliph. But he, too, was assassinated. Again his followers wanted the office to remain with his sons, but that was not to be. He was replaced with a caliph in what became the Sunni tradition.

Unwilling to accept the voice of the Ulema, the Shiite minority chose Ali's son Hasan to be their leader. They called this leader their "imam," the leader of the minority party. After he was killed, Hasan's brother, Husayn, assumed the role of the third Shia imam (counting Ali as the first imam). In a small but historically significant battle, Husayn - facing certain death at the hands of the greater Islamic Sunni army - died a martyr's death, and his martyrdom is commemorated every year by Shiite partisans with a ceremony of ritual self-inflicted wounds, bleeding on white robes. That bloody ritual is known as Ashura.

In recent years, while Saddam Hussein and his Sunni Baath Party governed Iraq, Shiites were forbidden to celebrate Ashura. This year, 2006, in the absence of Saddam, they were able again to celebrate their holiday, the first time in 30 years.

Sunni Muslims would say that the Shiites are sore losers. But to this day, Shiite Muslims continue to feel cheated. In the years following the martyrdom of Husayn, nine more imams picked up the mantle. Or was it four more? Or two imams more? That number depends on which branch of Shia Islam one refers to.

The largest branch followed a series of 12 imams, grandsons and great-grandsons of Muhammad. The 12th imam, the Mahdi, mysteriously disappeared and was believed to have "occulted" (floated into Paradise or a way station thereto) with a promise to return on a great apocalyptic day of reckoning. Some would argue that this day of reckoning is close at hand. And in light of current events in Iraq, this may be close to the truth.

In the great sea of Islam, about 80 percent or 90 percent (figures are disputed) of the more than 1 billion Muslims are Sunni.

Most of those remaining are members of one branch or another of Shia Islam. Whereas all Muslims make their pilgrimage to Mecca, Shiites make their hajj to Karbala as well. Shiites are the majority and controlling party in Iran (formerly Persia). But in Iraq, where Shiites outnumber Sunnis by three-to-one, the Sunni Muslims gained control of the government in 1958, and they have oppressed the Shiites. And because Iran and Iraq share a long border, separated by the Shatt al Arab River (confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates), Sunni Iraqis fear that the Shiite Iraqi Muslims have strong ties to Iran, their enemy since the days of Cyrus the Great.

In all of this I have not even mentioned the Kurds, another major player in the dynamic puzzle of Iraq. Presumably they will distance themselves from the upcoming internecine apocalypse.

I tell this story because it seems obvious to me and to many critics of our war in Iraq that when American troops toppled Saddam Hussein, we terribly needed to replace that national leadership with an authority structure that could control the competing interests and longstanding hatred between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. No such plan was adequate for the task at hand. And short of that, the destruction of the dome in Samarra may be the spark that ignites a firestorm of civil war that we cannot control. And of course it will be our fault - thanks to our president and the false claims of weapons of mass destruction.

There is a badly mistaken Republican notion that, to fix the world, all we have to do is enter the chaos with our bazookas and our killing machines, zap our enemies, and clean up the mess. That is the world according to Rummy and Shooter and George and Condoleezza, and it is a very mistaken notion.

We have sown the wind. Do you know what we will reap?

March 15, 2006

The Abortion Rate

A young friend told me of a conversation in Aesop's Cafe in Buckhannon. This fellow saw a classmate in the restaurant, and greeted him with the words, "How is my favorite Republican?"

To which the classmate replied, "I am neither a Republican nor a Democrat. I am a Christian. I vote pro-life."

Friends, not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom.

It is a fine thing to say, "I am pro-life." Those who make that claim undoubtedly voted for George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 elections. They believe that they have made a difference, and that they have affirmed family values. It is true that they have made a difference. But they have not supported family values. Quite the reverse.

Along with their support for this Republican administration, they have endorsed policies that reduced health care, employment rates, aid to education, and Social Security. They have weakened the American family. But so what? For these single-issue voters, the most important thing is abortion, and if they sacrifice a few economic issues, at least they supported the "moral" one. What would Jesus do?

In fact, teenage abortion rates are higher today than they were under President Clinton. Teenage abortion rates dropped each year during that Democratic administration. In 1993, the year Bill Clinton was inaugurated, the U.S. rate of abortions for women ages 15 to 19 was 33.9 per 1,000 teen pregnancies. In 1994, the rate was 31.6. That rate continued to drop every single year during the Clinton presidency. By 2000, the rate had dropped to 24. Teenage abortions dropped by about 30 percent under the Clinton administration.

George W. Bush claims to be "pro-life," and we should expect a continued drop in pregnancy rates during his administration. In fact, we should see the rate drop at an even greater rate, given the Republican "family values" language. That did not happen.

We have complete information for abortion rates in the United States for all of the years between 1990 and 2000. Information beyond 2000 is a bit sketchy. Only three states have reported on data up to 2003, and 13 more report data for 2001 and 2002. For teenage girls in those 16 states, abortion rates increased approximately 10 percent between 2000 and 2002, and continued to rise in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Missouri in 2003.

Why the increase during a "pro-life" presidency? It is what we call a "no-brainer." Most girls who have abortions want to keep the baby. But they feel trapped. They give three reasons for their abortion. They cannot afford the baby. They lack adequate health care. And their boyfriend abandoned them - often because he didn't have a job.

Under the current Republican administration, we have experienced a net loss of jobs matched only by the Hoover administration in the early 1930s. The minimum wage lags far behind the rising cost of living. And under the Bush administration, more than 5 million Americans have lost their health-care coverage. More than half of those are women.

In the 16 states that reported abortion information, there were 16,392 fewer marriages in 2002 than in 2001. And 7,869 more abortions. Extrapolating from those data, it appears that there were about 52,000 more abortions in the year 2002 than there would have been if the rate drop under Clinton had continued.

We also have good information on other nations where abortion has been outlawed. Almost all Latin American nations have outlawed abortion, and in some countries the penalty is up to five years in prison. Physicians or midwives performing the illegal operation are also likely to spend years in the clink. Knowing that abortion is illegal, and with the Catholic Church admonition regarding this "sin" against life, we should expect abortion rates to be much lower than in the United States, where it remains legal.

Not so. Rates in those Catholic nations south of our border are much higher than in the United States.

In Chile and Peru, the abortion rate per 1,000 pregnancies is about 50, compared to about 21 in the United States. Throughout Latin America, the rates are everywhere higher than in the United States. And about 5,000 women die every year in Latin America from clothes-hanger abortions. The reason given for clandestine abortions: poor economic conditions and a machismo culture. We cannot separate economic considerations from moral issues.

Since these data were released, the increase in abortions has stalled, and has held at a steady rate. But it is clear that Bush's "pro-life" language was not matched with a "pro-life" social policy necessary to sustain the ideal.

Roman Catholic bishops have warned that this increase in abortions would be the result of the Republican cutbacks in health care and jobs. They were right.

Dr. Glen Harold Stassen, a pro-life advocate and professor of Christian ethics at the (conservative and evangelical) Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, concludes that without the family support system needed in our social policy, the words "pro-life" are little more than tinkling brass or a noisy gong.

Where have I read those words before?

May 9, 2006

A Special Worship Service

We turned left at the light just after Buckhannon-Upshur Middle School and onto Tallmansville Road. Which is to say, we turned into the woodlands and mountains of Appalachia. We crossed the Buckhannon River, drove past the golf course, and abandoned civilization for the remainder of the day.

Tallmansville Road parallels the road to Sago, made famous by the mine disaster in January, and took us east into the highlands and forests of West Virginia. Day lilies and tiger lilies, phlox and stella d'oro lined our path as we disappeared into the shade of umbrella magnolia, shagbark hickory, catalpa, and hemlock trees. We climbed and made those "kissy-butt" turns necessary to negotiate West Virginia hills.

This was our trip to Mount Olive United Methodist Church where we joined members of five little one-room churches in a mountain parish scattered among the piedmont below Elkins and Mill Creek. We have driven this route to witness and enjoy what the Revs. Bonnie Starkely and Josie Tenney have named "ATV for JC" - all-terrain vehicles for Jesus Christ.

Eighteen miles deep beyond civilization, but 1,000 feet higher than Buckhannon, it snows here when it rains in town. Little school bus shelters dotted our path, and we shuddered to think of the long trip on slippery pavement made morning and evening by those yellow Bluebird buses. Little wonder Upshur County has so many snow days.

These are the beautiful lands John Denver calls "Almost Heaven." Truly it is. Yet for all that beauty, here are mobile homes, single-wide trailers and double-wides. This is what a 1969 film called "Rich Land, Poor People."

Grass freshly mown, lilies and bleeding hearts decorated the front stoops. Pickup in the driveway, or perhaps two. New little decks and barbecue grills overlooked six or seven tiers of mountains, turning from green to gray in the distant haze.

An add-on room pasted here and there onto trailers. An authentic old log cabin in the next hollow. Privies behind the houses, perhaps three or four units side by side. Is this an extended family, I wondered.

So here we were on top of the mountain, just a few hundred yards above Hemlock, at the one-room Mount Olive Church. The Hemlock Community building (concrete floor, iron posts supporting a steel roof, and six picnic tables) was sheltered by towering Norway spruce and guarded by early-blooming rhododendrons. Beside the church on one side of the road, and beside the community building on the other, we saw gravestones calling out the family names of those gathered on this warm Saturday afternoon: Tenney, Harris, Zickefoose.

There was a stone for a tiny child, born September 2003, died December 2004. There was a stone for an 18-year-old boy, grimly decorated with a favorite sports car.

The young mother in front of us in the food line looked proudly out among the stones and said: "My mother was a Tenney, my father a Harris. Those two families were the first settlers in these hills."

I wondered at that ominous name, Hemlock, ostensibly referring to the ubiquitous evergreen trees which darken the forest.

But along the roadside, down in the ditch, we see white-topped sumac and Queen Anne's lace.

Hiding among those weeds I also imagine I see the poisonous weed hemlock - the plant ancient Greeks used to kill their gadfly philosopher, the great Socrates - which has no connection to hemlock evergreen trees.

Bonnie and Josie have done their part in reaching out to the people of the woods, hill folk with scruffy beards and tussled hair. Nearly 30 ATVs crowd the tiny church parking lot. Lounging among those powerful vehicles were the young men of the neighborhood, big fellows with tattoos and open shirts.

Bonnie and Josie created the "ATV for JC" in response to local troublemakers, "rednecks" who rode their ATVs across the churchyard during the Sunday morning worship service. Instead of complaining or making a scene, these two female pastors invited the fellows to church. Not to the traditional Sunday morning worship, but to a special service just for them.

At least 100 hill people gathered there on the summer hillside: grandmothers and their little ones, teenagers, moms and dads, in addition to the bikers. And I could see that while these people dwell in their isolated mobile homes or shanties back in the woods, they are not alone. They are drawn together by the power and the wisdom of these two preachers, by their ties to the community and the church, and by the complex system of families and friends.

We listened to country music. Bonnie preached a fine sermon over the public address system, ending with an altar call. Josie gave a fine prayer, which ended when we all repeated the Lord's Prayer standing together beside the graves, the ATVs, and the community building.

We got lost on the return trip to Buckhannon, and couldn't find our way until a grinning stranger at "Bear Camp" pointed us in the direction of a Russian village named Czar.

July 13, 2006

Not Just the Players

I often hear people say, "I don't vote for the party, I vote for the person." Fair enough. That's like going to a baseball game and watching the players, not the teams. It's like sitting in the stands but not seeing the game. It's like a Yankee fan cheering for Mazeroski's home run.

When Peter played trombone in the Buckhannon-Upshur High School Band, of course he attended all of the home football games. Most of those Friday evenings saw Judy and me at the game as well, there more to cheer for the band than for the team. Sometimes, when we couldn't make it, Peter would come home happy and excited. We used to ask him "who won?" "I don't know," was his reply.

"Well, who were we playing?" "I don't know," again came the reply.

Pete enjoyed the evening with his friends and his music. He just never got interested in football. But he loved John Phillip Sousa and George Gershwin.

The year we lived in Cambridge, England, we often walked past the local cricket field. Often we saw boys or young men in white uniforms throwing a ball, running, hitting the ball with a stick, etc. I can assure you we saw the players, but we could not see the game.

When it comes to politics, a lot of people are like that. They can see the players, but they miss the game. They vote for the individual with no thought for the political party that candidate supports, or the political consequences of their vote. Too bad for American government. Because when the voters can see the players but not the game, they vote for bad government.

Government is a game played by political parties. Those parties have interests and agendas. And voters who can't see those interests and those agendas have no more idea what is going on than Judy and I when we tried to watch cricket. They are like Peter at the football game.

The word "politics" comes from the Greek word "polis," meaning "the city," as in metropolis, Minneapolis, Neapolitan.

Our Western civilization was built on the cornerstones of two great books on politics. Plato wrote *The Republic* as sort of a depth psychological study of political organization in Athens. The city, he wrote, is "man writ large." Aristotle wrote *Politics* as an empirical study of actual political institutions in the known world.

Plato's book is best known for the allegory of the cave, a really great argument for the liberal arts, a demonstration of how citizens walk around with blinders on, not looking behind the scenes to see what is really going on. But he was a bit too conservative for me. He liked a rigid caste system, racial purity, and slavery. He thought women were good for only one thing. And he hated democracy. I suppose he had good reason for that. His beloved Socrates was executed by virtue of a democratic vote in the Agora.

I liked Aristotle's *Politics* because he analyzed actual existing city governments, choosing those elements in each government he liked and criticizing the ones he didn't like. He inspired his students to do comparative analysis.

The idea of political parties makes little sense in totalitarian governments. But in democracies, parties flourish. They are formed by people who have common interests, citizens who want to achieve political goals that will benefit themselves or their class of people - or, perhaps, will benefit the larger society or humankind as a whole.

Since one person's meat is another's poison, political parties necessarily clash. And since one person's view of "the common good" is another's view of bad government or even pandemonium, good government is necessarily a struggle of political interests and political parties. So how can a political party which represents the interests of only a small percent of the population win an election? They have to put up "pretty" candidates and trick the public. They must hide their true interests and their intent.

They have to nominate the candidates who will win the hearts of those voters who say, "I vote for the person, not the party."

And often the best way to win an election is to tell a few lies and sucker the electorate into voting for nifty slogans. So as we enter another season of elections and politics, please take a word from Plato. Look around and try to figure out what is going on. It's a struggle of political interests. When you send a "good" candidate into the fray, you strengthen one team and weaken the other. Don't vote for Mazeroski if you are a Yankee fan.

July 31, 2006

What I Heard You Say

War is a form of communication. A strong form.

War always carries a message. It is a way of speaking. I am listening. I am trying to hear what combatants are saying, to each other, to their neighbors, to the world.

This is what I hear Israel saying to Hezbollah: "Leave us alone! We are here. We are here to stay. Nothing you can do will move us. This is our land, and we will keep it. Don't mess with us.

"You kidnapped two of our soldiers. We want them back. We want them back in a real big way. You are lobbing bombs into our land. We want that to stop. When you kidnapped those two men, you drew a line in the sand, and you invited us to come across that line and fight you. You brought this war upon yourself, believing, perhaps, that you could defeat us. So here we are. We are going to get in your face. We are going to bother you. But we offer you a choice. You may return those two men and stop lobbing bombs into our land, or we will destroy you. We will utterly destroy you. This is your choice. This time now we will not stop until we have killed every last member of Hezbollah, or until you surrender and return our two soldiers. And we expect that those two men will have been well cared for, and are alive and well when you return them to us. We find it very irritating when a terrorist organization sneaks into our country and kidnaps our people."

Israel is also speaking to Lebanon, her neighbor on the north. This is what I hear her saying: "Dear people of Lebanon. We want to be a good neighbor. The last thing in the world we want to do is to cause trouble with our neighbors. We visited your land once before, with our soldiers and our war material. We crossed your southern border in 1982 because the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO, violated your land, set up shop in the little Shi'ite villages near Israel, and they used those villages, filled with innocent Arab people, as launching pads to send their guerillas into our land, to bomb our school buses and our restaurants, to kill innocent people.

"We drove the PLO out of your land, and tried to establish a safe zone in the southern land of Lebanon. In doing that, many innocent people were hurt, of course, and Beirut was very badly damaged. We are sorry.

"But today another terrorist organization, Hezbollah, has replaced the presence of the PLO, and that organization is dedicated to the complete destruction of Israel. It is their stated purpose to drive all of the Jews into the sea. They have harassed us and bothered us one time too many. Now it is time for reprisal. It is time for us to say to Hezbollah, no more! Dear friends of Lebanon. Do you not understand that we are a little nation, and we cannot tolerate the harassment from the north?

"We also recognize, good friends in the north, that this is not your fault.

"You did not invite Hezbollah to set up shop and attack us. Oh we are sorry. Truly we are. But until and unless you are able to maintain a civil society which takes control of those who would undermine your government and destroy your society, you will have to know that we will defend ourselves, even if that means we must hurt you, our dear neighbor on the north. Forgive us."

Israel is also speaking to the world. This is what I hear her saying: "Dear World. Dear colleagues at the United Nations. Dear Kofi Annan. Dear Secretary Condoleezza Rice and President Bush. Dear friends in Europe and Asia and Africa. It is with overwhelming regret that we find ourselves once more in the land of Lebanon, the land of great Cedars and cool waters. This is not our choice. This is the last thing in the world we wanted to do. We are not happy to move our tanks and our soldiers into this weak but beautiful land on our northern border.

"But surely you understand. It is not possible to allow the terrorists to sit in those little Arab villages, to hide behind the skirts of Lebanese women (for that is what they do) and then attack us and return to hide behind those skirts. Surely, dear world community, surely you are able to see that this is not a possible scenario. Surely you know that no nation with one very small drop of dignity can allow that to happen.

"Moreover, we cannot bring a quick halt to our military excursion. If we stop before complete annihilation of these terrorists, we will just have to face them again. And again. And forever, until either they are annihilated, or we are. So we are in this for a conclusive solution this time. No more Hezbollah cowards attacking from behind women's skirts. We will take this to its logical outcome.

"So World, we are sorry. We cannot stop now. We will finish what they started."

Those are the words I hear from Israel. But Hezbollah is also speaking. The message from Hezbollah is not so complicated. It is a one-liner.

Here is what I hear them saying: "Israel, you must abandon those settlements you built in the Occupied Territories, and you must give that land back to the Arab people to whom it belongs. And as long as you occupy those lands, you will feel the sting of Hezbollah. There are many young Arab boys and girls who will replace those you kill. Two for one. We promise. We promise."

And in the midst of this little conversation, Lebanon is burning.

Collateral damage.

September 1, 2006

End of an Era

Strader's men store closed some 20 years ago. Shannon's Hardware is gone, lock, stock, and barrel. Literally! In its place is a parking lot and mini-mall. You can shop at Books, Books, Books, rent a video, get a massage or a manicure, or drink a cup of Equal Exchange Coffee while Kim Howard prints your copies - all where Shannon's used to stand.

Doug and Yvonne Stewart bought two of the three units of our famed G.C. Murphy's, converting them to an antique store, and C.J. Maggie's has taken the south end of Murphy's. When we moved to Buckhannon 36 years ago, my friends told me to keep an eye on the sidewalk in front of Murphy's. "That's where the old men hang out and trade wristwatches," my friends told me. C.J. Maggie's brags that it is located exactly "above the center of the planet." That's special.

Aesop's Cafe has taken the back end of Mike Oldaker's Book Store, and The Daily Grind has made it a pleasure to walk down the alley behind Main Street. Ross Straight created the city seal, and Deborah Dorland painted that seal in magnified colors on the empty brick wall across from the courthouse.

This is not your father's Buckhannon. But one thing remained.

Home Hardware stood stalwart against the rages of time. Well, it stood stalwart until I received my July "accounts due" statement. There with the charge for paint and scraper was a letter from Eddie Hinkle, vice president of Home Hardware Inc. That's right. Eddie still lets me charge stuff, and he sends me a bill at the end of the month. I can't pay with a credit card. Gotta write him a check. But no more. Eddie reported that Home Hardware is closing its doors.

But here's one you won't believe. He's got an adding machine on the counter, the kind with a little roll of paper tape, but I've never seen him use it. He takes out that little pad of pink and yellow paper, places a piece of carbon paper between the pink and yellow, and writes the numbers down with a wooden pencil.

Paint, \$18.47, he writes. Two brushes @ \$7.52 dot dot \$15.04. Scraper, \$6.22. Hey, where's the bar code? Now here's the trick. He hums a little tune under his breath, and then writes the number 3 at the bottom right hand corner of the page, then mumbles "carry my one." Puts a one at the top of the page, right over the 4, and then writes the number 7 to the left of the three, and eventually comes up with a total of \$39.73. How did he do that? I sign my name and Eddie says, "Come again, John." I wish I could.

When I was a child, my grade school had unvarnished oak floors. If you stayed after school you would see the janitor, Mr. Taylor, sprinkle oiled saw dust on those unvarnished floors, and then push a 36-inch broom back and forth across the boards, one room after another. That was just before the Oakland School burned down, all the way to the ground, on a cold and rainy October evening.

I couldn't believe it the other evening when I was the last customer out of Home Hardware, and one of the fellows started sprinkling that same oiled saw dust on the unvarnished floor. Same thing.

The nicest thing about Home Hardware, besides the fact that everybody knows your name, was the Warm Morning stove. The store occupied what appeared to be three units on Main Street. The left hand (south) unit was filled with washers and dryers and other home appliances. The accountant and female clerks occupied the middle unit, where you could purchase glassware and kitchen utensils. But the right hand unit of the store was the real hardware, and although the women sometimes slipped over and sold you a hammer or bag of nails, you really knew that was the men's side of the store. You want nails? Janice takes a little scoop and dishes out a handful of nails from the wooden keg under the counter. She shakes them onto a mechanical scale, squints her eyes to read the weight in ounces, and records your charge on the little pad.

I bought my hand-crank ice cream freezer there on the right side of the store, many years ago. On the men's side, that is. I bought all my basement tools, all my paints and varnishes, all my wasp spray and tomato dust (Sevin) on the north side of the store.

And on a cold morning I used to stop in on the men's side of the store and warm my hands at the coal-fired Warm Morning stove. I warmed my hands whether or not I had any shopping to do. And on Saturday afternoons in the fall of the year I could check the black and white television overhead to see how the Mountaineers were doing against Marshall or Maryland.

The Record Delta carried a beautiful story about the closing of Home Hardware last Friday, and you knew it was the end of an era when the story came out.

So I've been reading Tom Friedman's "The World is Flat," as I mentioned before. What a powerful book. Friedman describes for us the 10 "flatteners" that brought an end to Strader's, Perce Ross, Murphy's, Shannon's, and Home Hardware. There's the fiber optic revolution, the outsourcing to China, the work ethic in Bangalore, the dot-com bubble and bust, Y2K, the bar code revolution, the supply-chaining, the work-flow software, uploading, and off-shoring. And the fall of the Berlin Wall. Long ago, Columbus reported to his king and queen that the world is round. No longer.

Dear friends, not only is this not your father's Buckhannon. This is not even your father's planet. (But you can still eat a fine steak dinner directly above the center of it, if you visit our little town.)

September 11, 2006

A Response to Global Warming

I want to ask all Gazette readers to be more kind to your neighbors. If you will just do that, we will have a better world. If you smoke, please stop. You will be better off and healthier. I strongly recommend that you stop drinking liquor, too. If everyone would stop getting drunk, our highways would be much safer. And while we are at it, please obey the speed laws, stop at all stoplights and stop signs. And you just have to stop talking on your cell phone while you drive. Cut the gossip while you are at it.

Most of you are eating too much. You've got to cut back. Think of your health. You will live longer if you knock off a few pounds. You students should study harder. Read more, party less. If you would read your books more carefully, you would soon achieve the standard set by the children of Lake Wobegon. You would all be above average. Et cetera, ad nauseam.

Judy and I joined our friends and colleagues the other night to watch Al Gore's wonderful film, "An Inconvenient Truth," in the Wesleyan chapel. Judy's Buckhannon Democratic Women's group asked Angela Gay Kinkead, Wesleyan chaplain, to order the movie, which she did. I emphasize that we watched it with friends and colleagues. Which is to say, the audience appeared to be wall-to-wall Democrats. Gore was preaching to the choir.

My assignment was to create a discussion in our Sunday school class based on the film. Everyone (all nine of us) in the class agreed on one thing: the information was correct but not new. We all knew, more or less, what the film had to say. And all of us were concerned. Yes, the globe is warming up. Yes, the global thermometer has been on an upward trajectory for more than a century - with little jiggles now and then. Yes, the polar ice cap is melting. Fast! Yes, the polar bears are being killed in the process. Yes, the oceans are rising, and before the end of this century they will totally inundate Manhattan Island, San Francisco, Miami. Yes, the Katrina crisis last year will soon be forgotten as we begin to sandbag Los Angeles and Portland.

Yes, North Carolina beaches will recede to Durham and Charlotte. Yes, mosquitoes will thrive in the mountains of Colorado. Would you like to tell me something new?

I did learn one thing: This is no longer a controversial issue. A survey of 928 climate scientists yielded 100 percent agreement. Not one scientist disagreed with the claim that the globe is warming, much too fast, and that this is being caused by human behavior.

Not one. The score: 928-0.

I am old enough to remember the "wisdom" of President Eisenhower in the early years of the civil rights movement. Ike advised us, from his bully pulpit, that we did not need new laws or federal intervention to deal with racial prejudice. What we needed, he correctly pointed out, was for all of us to have a change of heart, to treat our neighbors as we want to be treated ourselves. The problems of discrimination and racial prejudice will go away when we all start acting like good Christian people. Yes indeed, the world will be better when we all improve our behavior. And all of the policemen can retire and we can close all of our jails.

Friends, Gore asked us all to be better behaved. He sent us to an electronic Web site, climatecrisis.net, for a really good list of 10 things each of us can do. We've just got to turn the lights off when we leave the room. We've got to drive smaller cars and check the air pressure in our tires. We absolutely must walk or ride a bike instead of driving down the block. We must start wearing sweaters and turning the thermostat down to 68 or 67. We must replace our light bulbs with fluorescents.

Like the platitudes I listed above, these recommendations are absolutely correct and absolutely inadequate. Of course our students will be smarter when they study more. Of course we will live longer if we lose some of those pounds and quit smoking. Of course Planet Earth will be better off when we turn off lights and plant a tree. And I absolutely recommend the full list of 10 ways each one of us can help.

But the crisis is huge and we are tiny. We cannot bring ourselves to do what we know we must do. We will continue to drive big cars, leave lights on and the thermostat up, drink too much and play too much. We just cannot change.

I am inclined to be hopeless, but I cannot be. The only possible solution to the global crisis is a change in political philosophy. It is not a change we want to make. But the solution to global warming requires new laws that will restrict our freedom. And we will hate it. We must make laws that require smaller and more fuel-efficient cars. Our government must subsidize public transportation. Big time. We must tax our energy sources so that we drive less and heat less. Our grandchildren depend upon it.

October 23, 2006

Safety Net

Franklin Roosevelt didn't want to use the term "cradle to grave" in public, but that's what he meant. That is exactly what he had in mind. He asked Frances Perkins, the first woman ever to serve in a presidential cabinet, not to say those words either. But that is where they were headed. Those were fighting words, and the Republicans in Congress in 1934 and 1935 wanted nothing to do with such political philosophy.

The modern idea of a safety net for all the people goes back to 1883, when the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck first introduced legislation of the kind. But it is as old as the Bible itself. Taking care of our neighbors. Protecting the poor and working together to help one another is as old as the Hebrew prophets. It is the legislation of the Golden Rule. When Social Security was enacted in 1935, it was the legal embodiment of the Good Samaritan. It was Roosevelt's crowning social achievement.

There, in the depths of the Depression, with bread lines snaking around the city streets, bank closures destroying life savings and retirement incomes, rioters attacking small town banks as they foreclosed on family farms across the nation, Roosevelt had a dream. His dream indeed was that of a safety net "from the cradle to the grave." And while that dream has never fully been implemented, it remains a major goal of those of us who live on the left side of the political spectrum. And perhaps that dream alone provides the major dividing line between the political left and the political right in American thought today. It is anathema to those who live on the right.

I think I understand the voice from the right. But I disagree with it. A safety net like that supposedly destroys the incentive to work. Or so they say. And it is unfair. It is Robin Hood legislation. It takes from the rich and gives to the poor. It taxes those who work to pay for those who loaf. That's what we call the "dole," and Roosevelt had to avoid such a label. Well, that's the downside of a good idea. Nothing is perfect.

But we are in the process, continually, of defining and redefining ourselves as a national society. Are we one people, or are we many individuals? The Left sees us more as one people, the Right as individuals. And I am on the left. We join ourselves together to educate our children. We join ourselves together to build our highways and bridges, our national parks and our wildlife preserves. And we join ourselves to defend our shores and our borders and our way of life. We join ourselves together to make our laws and our customs and our rules for daily living. And we must join ourselves together to maintain the safety net, which protects us when we fall.

Some of us are strong. Others weak. Some are bright, some are dull. Some of us are religious, others are not. Some are morally superior, others live at the other end of that spectrum. The famous French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, taught us to think of society as a bell curve, with most of us in the middle, but some on each end, like Saint-Exupery's snake which swallowed the elephant. Little head and little tail, big in the middle. But there we are. Good and bad. Smart and dumb. Industrious and lazy. All one society. Most of us in the middle. But we must take care of our neighbors.

In 1935 there was a load of racism in the conservative opposition to Social Security - or any form of government-supported old-age pension. The Jackson Daily News wrote that "the average Mississippian can't imagine himself chipping in to pay pensions for able-bodied Negroes to sit around in idleness on front galleries while cotton and corn crops are crying for workers." That attitude assured that farm workers were excluded. In the end, the 1935 Social Security Act covered 60 percent of white workers and only 35 percent of black workers.

Passage wasn't easy. Roosevelt had the famed Louisiana Senator Huey Long on his left, crying out for more. He had Republicans and Southern Democrats on his right, opposing him at every move. Hans Morgenthau, secretary of the Treasury and one of his neighbors at Hyde Park, insisted that the safety net must be governed by each of the 48 states.

The states, he insisted, were the "laboratories of democracy."

But by hook and by crook, FDR guided his safety net through Congress, and in January 1940, Miss Ida May Fuller, of rural Vermont, received the first Social Security check ever written in America. The check was for \$22.54.

On July 3, 1997, our daughter-in-law gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Her name is Lacey. I wrote of her 10 years ago. Lacey was born with a malformed heart and has spent many days in the hospitals in Morgantown and in Boston. Doctors have cut her open time and again to fix that little throbbing organ. While she was in Ruby Memorial, we visited once and saw a clear plastic sheet covering her open heart. We saw her little heart beating. While in Ruby Memorial, she suffered a serious stroke, a stroke that damaged important parts of her brain.

Friends, I thank you. I thank the many doctors and nurses, educators and neighbors who have supported her. But most of all, I thank the American taxpayer. It is you who pay your taxes to provide the financial support that keeps our little Lacey alive and, frankly, doing pretty well. She is a happy and joyous little angel. That is possible only because you have supported her through your federal income taxes. That was the safety net. We are all in this together. That was Roosevelt's idea. Thanks, all of you.

Now we are engaged in this great civil debate, testing whether our nation or any nation so conceived should provide the cradle-to-grave net of safety. What kind of a safety net? What kind of society are we today? Do we help our neighbors, or tell them to go it alone? In the 109th Congress, we struggled over the structure of Social Security. Conservatives again wanted to terminate Social Security, or at least privatize it. They failed. In the 110th Congress that just convened on January 4, we will struggle over "universal health care." This will be a bitter fight, with Republicans opposing it all the way, but with this legislation we will define ourselves as a civil society.

December 25, 2006

Armenian Genocide

Surely, of all the cities of the world, Istanbul is the most exotic. Gateway to Asia. Eastern capital of the Roman Empire. City of Emperor Constantine. City astride two continents. Religious capital of the Eastern Orthodox Church. City of sultans and harems, belly dancers in diaphanous costume. Turkish baths. The Topkapi Palace and the Dolmabahce Palace. Armenian genocide. The Hagia Sophia. The Blue Mosque. Bektashi and Whirling Dervishes. The Sufis. The Grand Souk. Byzantium. The mythological Jason passed this way in search of the Golden Fleece.

Here are minarets and calls to prayer and fine Turkish carpets. Here Xerxes led his Persian armies into Greece. Here later Alexander crossed to Asia in his quest to subdue the world. Ataturk. The Ottoman Empire. Janissaries. "It's Istanbul, not Constantinople now," we used to sing. The name was changed in 1453 - the year that city fell to the Turks. A few miles to the south is the site of the tragic battle of Gallipoli in 1915.

Earlier this year the city of Istanbul was rocked by the murder of a noted Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, the 52-year-old editor of the Turkish-Armenian newspaper, *Agos*. Dink was gunned down by a teenage boy, apparently in reprisal for claiming that the death of 1 million Turkish Armenians was genocide. You are not allowed to say that in Turkey. You are not allowed to speak of the killing of a million Armenians in the second decade of the 20th century.

And for some strange reason, the fact of that genocide has never been officially recognized even by our own government.

I would not mention this, except that it has become an issue in American foreign policy. There is a push, more on the Democratic side of the aisle, to assert an official recognition of the Armenian genocide, sometimes called the first Holocaust of the Twentieth Century. But in Turkey there is complete denial of that fact, and to recognize the event in Congress will threaten U.S.-Turkish relations.

The story is told many times over in the dusty books on back shelves of libraries all across America. It is told a hundred times over on the World Wide Web. Just go to any search engine and type the words "Armenian Genocide." Hundreds of grizzly photographs will make your stomach turn. Starvation. Decapitation. Death marches and macabre train rides. Pyramids of human skulls. Massacre. Still, it is verboten.

Perhaps you can picture, in your mind's eye, the region in and around eastern Turkey, defined on the north by the Caucasus Mountains, particularly by the tall Mount Ararat - where, according to the book of Genesis, Noah's ark first found dry land. Here, between the Caspian and the Black Seas, dwell dozens of competing ethnic and language groups. Here today meet the modern nations of Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Here dwell the Kurds and the Armenians, Muslims and Christians, struggling throughout the 20th century for statehood, land, and recognition. Caught in the vortex between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

For centuries the Armenians, Kurds, and Turks got along OK. The Armenians were considered loyal to the Ottoman Empire, accepting with little protest their second-class citizenship. But with the rise of nationalism in the 19th century and the demise and "decrepitude" of the old Ottoman Empire - called the "Sick Man of Europe" first by Russian Tsar Nicholas I - Armenians began to suffer. While the Turks wanted to expand their dominion east into what is today known as Turkistan, Armenians demanded their own independence and national state. They were an obstruction to Turkish ambitions.

In the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Armenians sided with Russia, and Christian Russians supported their religious brothers. After that war, the Armenians were blamed for the defeat of Turks at the hands of "Christian" Russia.

On April 24, 1915, hundreds of Armenians were rounded up and gunned down in the city of Istanbul. One million Armenians are said to have died in the next three years. But one must never speak of this within the confines of modern Turkey. It simply did not happen.

Hrank Dink, the Armenian editor, dared to say what could not be said. He paid the high price for those words. And today there is a renewed call for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

I was the first guest to be seated in the coffee shop at the Nippon Hotel in downtown Istanbul one morning in January more than a dozen years ago. Seven o'clock. I ordered my coffee and read an English language newspaper. And out of the window I saw a big black bear on the city street, leashed to a fellow out for his morning walk. I asked the waitress. "Gypsy and dancing bear," she said in her pretty-good English. Surely this is an exotic city.

February 8, 2007

Trains

You can catch the Super Chief out of Lawrence, Kansas, at 2:07 a.m. This Santa Fe coach will pull in to the tiny, seldom-used 1950s-style station (that's yellow brick and cheap mortar) and make a quick stop.

The porter will step onto the platform, call your name, and lift your bags. At 2:08 you are on your way to Topeka, Dodge City, and points west. By sunrise you can see where the deer and the antelope actually play, see the prairie dog hills and the town where Kitty and Matt maintained law and order and a heck of a lot of good times. The graves are so shallow in Boot Hill you can still see the toes of the gunslingers' boots poking up.

You would think that the most famous train in the whole United States, the Santa Fe Chief, would want to visit the city for which it is named. Not so! To visit Santa Fe, New Mexico, you must jump off the Chief at Lamy, New Mexico, and ride a taxi north for an hour to that adobe brick town where Navajo women sell turquoise and silver jewelry, blankets, and juniper-seed necklaces, and where Hopi and Jemez mothers hock their world-famous pottery while seated cross-legged on the sidewalk at the Palace of Governors.

Those Navajo grandmothers, by the way, still wear their velveteen blouses made popular by the army wives at Bent's Fort back in the days of Kit Carson and an Apache outlaw named Geronimo.

But if you want to take the train to Lamy or Albuquerque from anywhere east of Indianapolis, you will have to ride through Chicago, Illinois. There is no other Amtrak line between here and there.

Which is to say, we are not one bit serious about global warming, melting icebergs, or our dependence on Middle East oil.

Public transportation has disappeared from our national consciousness, and the last time anybody out here west of St. Louis gave it a thought was the day they read Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

When I was a boy, my folks used to take us over to the Union Pacific and Rock Island depot in Topeka where, for an evening's recreation, we watched the trains come in and pull out, and we listened to the music of the oncoming streamliner and the conductor calling out to the waiting passengers, "All aboard."

Well, unless you read Stephen Ambrose's *Nothing Like it in the World*, I am guessing you know not one darned thing about how the Chinese coolies and the Irish laborers laid the track between Omaha and San Francisco, and how they tunneled through the Rocky Mountains and met to drive the Golden Spike in Promontory Point, Utah. Nor do you care. But you should care. Public transportation is the only serious alternative to America's dependence on oil, and anybody who grew up in a train town, as I did, knows that trains burn West Virginia coal. Or at least they used to, and could do it again if we took our oil problems seriously.

I like the Santa Fe Super Chief because you can carry your morning coffee up into the dome car and watch the mountains come into view as you approach Trinidad and the Raton Pass, and for breakfast you eat your eggs and marmalade toast on a linen table cloth, served by a handsome fellow whose great-great-grandfather worked with A. Phillip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

I'm not going to lie to you and claim that the little private rooms in the Pullman coach are the epitome of comfort, or that the 4-foot-by-8-foot beds are the extreme of luxury. But the clicketyclack of the wheels on the track would cast the world's worst insomniac into a heavy snore.

But public transportation isn't cheap. And beginning in 1830, when the "Tom Thumb" carried the first passengers out of Baltimore, our tracks were laid with a mixture of capital adventurism and public investment.

And we are indebted to those venture capitalists who put their bucks into the dream of a rail system stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We are also indebted to an American president who guided us through the terrible years from 1861 to 1865, and who wisely supported those capitalist dreamers.

Abraham Lincoln gave away a million acres to the men who built our railroads. It could not have happened without the public gift. I'm not complaining. I'm not saying old Abe shouldn't have done it. But it was that mixture of individual initiative and capital investment, of government funds and the support of Congress. And we will need to do the same thing again today if we are serious about reducing fuel consumption and greenhouse gases. We will have to pay for it with public money.

With public money we built our canals and our highways. We built the turnpikes and the country roads, the bridges, and the tunnels. And passenger service would have disappeared but for the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970, our national investment in Amtrak. Now we must do that again.

Nor do I want to hear you fellows claim that you are interested in public transportation unless you have set aside that little place in the basement where only men and boys can gather, that place where you put up the sign that reads, "Sisters, go up and play with your dolls." That's where you have laid out your Lionel tracks and your Potemkin village, where you can put your lips to that wooden whistle and blow the sound of an oncoming train. And you know the phone number of the Fairchance Pharmacy in Pennsylvania, that little drug store just a few miles northeast of Morgantown, where you can purchase the latest in model trains and railroad paraphernalia. And dream about your next train ride across the Kansas Prairie and over the Rocky Mountain passes.

February 26, 2007

Angels

It's Good Friday. I'm on the ninth floor of St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota. When anybody comes by and asks me how I'm doing, I reply, "Super! I couldn't be better!" But friends, that's a big fat lie. I am not super. And I could be doing a whole lot better.

I say that from my hospital bed, so they know it's a great big lie. I am in this room confirming the truism that getting old is not for sissies. As my mother got older and watched her body break down, she used to say, "Well, you can either laugh or cry." She preferred the former. Me too.

I have learned a lot about the sciatic nerve - a lot I never wanted to know. Still don't want to know. But I am learning. Anyway, St. Mary's is part of the Mayo Clinic system. And in my situation, this is the right place to be.

As I guess you all know, Mayo Clinic is one of the great medical centers of the world. I am here because my two neurologists at the WVU Medical Center sent me here. Dr. Ludwig Gutmann and Dr. Chris Nantz both did their internships at the Mayo Clinic.

Folks, the people who work at the clinic are brilliant, and they are very kind. I have a physical therapist who wants me to use a walker and a "splint" for my right foot. The little splint fits into my shoe, under my sock where nobody can see. That's good, because I don't want anybody to see how I limp and hobble. But I tell her I don't need it.

When she talks to me, I want to tell her, "Hey, this isn't me! Don't you know, you are speaking to the captain of my high school wrestling team. I am the lifeguard at the big-city pool. I am the runner who scrambled four times around the track at the Kansas University Relays in a sparkling 5:24! I am not this fellow you see hobbling between bed and bathroom." I want to scream that in her ear. And I do tell her so. Sweetly she smiles, and says, "Well, if you ever do need a foot splint, this is what it will probably look like." I assure her I will never wear a contraption like that.

So another doctor comes in to talk with me. She wants me to walk up and down the hall with her. As we walk (hobble), she sweetly asks why I refuse to get the splint. I hesitate, and then confess: "Testosterone," I tell her. Wrestling captains don't use walkers. Lifeguards don't wear splints.

What do you think I am? A cripple? I don't say that, but I think it.

But my highest marks go to the nurses who care for me. These are the unsung heroes at any hospital. The nurses at St. Mary's, and also at Ruby Memorial in Morgantown or St. Joseph's in Buckhannon. I'm talking the student nurses in my classes. I'm talking Florence Nightingale. I'm talking Clara Barton.

I used to say I don't really believe in angels. In years gone by, I would have told you that angels are part of the mythology that grew up around the Christ story. I don't say that anymore. I see very clearly now that angels come to us wearing ordinary clothing, with ordinary faces. Often they wear a nurse's uniform.

Here is one young student nurse from Luther College in Iowa, a few miles south of Rochester. She will spend one day with me, ministering to me and learning from me. Learning about old men, I should say. I try to explain, as best I can, what I understand about my condition. My right leg is weak, I tell her. Apparently I have a condition called Lewis Sumner Syndrome, or LSS. It is an inflamed sciatic nerve, and the inflammation weakens my right leg and foot. We don't know what causes it. It is a very rare condition.

I am here, I tell her, because I came to Mayo for a biopsy.

Dr. Robert Spinner cut into my rear end and took a small piece of my sciatic nerve, which will be the subject of careful analysis. "I'm the guy who gave you that pain in the butt," Spinner tells me. I am here in this room, I tell her, recovering from the surgery and receiving an intravenous drain of gamma globulin, a product found in human blood which helps my body counter the inflammation surrounding my nerve.

At the end of the day, she comes back with notebook in hand. She wants to ask some questions. "How do you cope?" she asks. I try to think. The first thing that comes to mind is the great cost of all of this. But that cost is largely covered by Medicare and my AARP insurance, the social system of which I am a part. And then there is our wonderful family, three kids, their wives and husband, seven grandchildren. Then I realize that our church community in Buckhannon provides Judy and me with truly overwhelming support. We are a part of the church, I tell her. And the church is the Body of Christ. We have the greatest coping system in the world.

At the end of each shift, my nurses come to say goodbye. "Have a good life," I tell them. And then I remember a favorite passage. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Tell me about it.

March 10, 2007

The Godless Liberals

While watching the endless CNN report on the Virginia Tech massacre, my eye wandered down to the little ticker tape running across the bottom of the screen. The Supreme Court had just ruled, 5-4, that the late-term abortion ban will stand. One little chink out of the 1972 written-in-soft-stone Roe v. Wade ruling. And the godless liberal agenda. God wins. The lib'rals lose. Mark one up for Big Daddy. And his right-wing defenders of the faith. George W. got it right this time. He loaded the Supreme Court with true believers, marching as to war.

Friends, it isn't easy for the religious right and the religious left to understand each other, much less to appreciate one another. We are very much given to caricature, to sarcasm, ridicule. The first thing I want to do when I read that abortion-ban ticker tape is talk about coat hangers, back alleys, doctors, and young women filling our county jails. And blood.

I won't do that here. I will start by telling those on the right that there is something beautiful and pure in your motive to save the babies. I will not doubt that your efforts to "save the babies" (I won't say "fetus") have indeed saved some, perhaps many, unborn little creatures, little gifts from God, little squirming boys and girls who will forever thank you for giving them life. Who knows? One of them might some day become the president of our great nation, or find the cure for cancer or heart disease, or lead a campaign for world peace.

And yet the issue is not that simple.

And we on the left are struggling to support the right of women to choose abortion ("it's a life, not a choice"). But friends, you did not save those little ones with that court ruling. You did not save them with policemen and prisons. You saved them with your giant billboards and your powerful campaign. And your caring. But now - prison and punishment. Is that what Jesus would have done?

But let's talk about the godless religion of the "left."

Whenever we visit Jennifer in Cleveland or Peter in Philadelphia, I slip away to the big Borders bookstores near their homes. With a warm cappuccino in my hand, I wander through the front section to see what's big on America's bookshelves today. "The DaVinci Code" - still. Another Harry Potter. Diana. Lots of self-help stuff. Lots and lots of that. My eye catches the latest Ann Coulter book, not so much because of the title but because of the fetching cover. The Church of Liberalism, she writes. Godless.

Inside her alluring book jacket, she describes the loose-living, drug-addicted, sex-starved perverts, guitar-strumming hippies, lockstep in another protest march with placards whining the latest anti-American slogans. Democrats all. America's liberals, out to destroy the nation most-blessed by the one true God. Never fear. In His corner, God has Ann Coulter, George Bush, and the new Supreme Court lined up to protect His interests and save America. Praise the Lord.

I think my kids were surprised when I bought her book. I want to know the enemy, I told them. Besides, the cover is fetching. Godless liberals. Isn't she the authority on theology?

That may be, but Jesus was a liberal. Absolutely and totally a liberal. Not a conservative bone in His body. He broke the rules. On purpose. He flaunted them, in fact, eating with sinners, healing on the Sabbath, rescuing a fallen woman, criticizing the establishment. And the well-to-do. He was not crucified because He was too conservative. The Christian faith is not about rules. Jesus' first public utterance shows His compassion for the poor. He never asks us to sing pretty songs, to build cathedrals, or wiggle our fingers in the air. He tells Peter, "Feed my sheep."

The Hebrew Prophets were liberals. By definition. Social critics. Reformers. Nathan stood face to face with King David, shook his finger and told him he was a murderer. Amos was a liberal. He measured the corruption of Beth'el up against the plumb line of justice. Amaziah told him to go home, "you troubler of Israel." "Let justice roll down like waters," Amos replied.

Check Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah while you're at it.

These were not the Republicans of Palestine. They were not trying to shore up the establishment or save the wealthy.

Jeremiah was a liberal. He wrote the book on public protest and nonviolent direct action. He trod the streets of Jerusalem naked as a jaybird to make his point.

The history of the church is the story of liberal versus conservative religion. It begins in Jerusalem, when Peter and Paul struggle over the issue of circumcision. The great St. Augustine tells us to "love God and do whatever you want." Not conservative there! Was Martin Luther a conservative when he challenged orthodoxy on 95 points of theology? Was John Wesley a conservative when he took his Bible to the streets and the coal mines of England? Were the Methodists in America conservative when, in 1908, they adopted the "Social Creed," supporting the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively? And is our church conservative in its continued struggle for social justice, for the rights of women and minorities, for equal opportunity for all, for ecological responsibility - through the Social Principles and Social Creed?

No, Ann Coulter, the prophets were not godless. Neither were Jesus, Augustine, Luther, Wesley. Nor is the church today. You spoke out of overwhelming and malicious ignorance. Shame on you.

May 11, 2007

The Long Bus Ride

Phone rings. It's for me. "Dr. Warner, this is Sheri Havernewbrough. Could I come over to talk with you for a few minutes? I'd like to run something by you." Later we sit on our back deck as the sun dips behind the trees in our little forest.

Sheri taught the juvenile delinquency course at Wesleyan while I was chairman of the department of sociology. Graduate education in criminology at Arizona State University. Mother of two teenagers. Tenacious woman, determined to get things right. Thorn in the flesh of our local school board. It's about a struggle between Mrs. H and the Upshur County Board of Education.

Sheri is wearing a T-shirt with the word "Grenadines" printed in large letters. I ask her about it. "From my days in the Peace Corps," she explains. Let's just say Sheri is not a Republican.

I think I understand the problem. Sheri and her family live on Hall Road near Buckhannon. The bus ride to and from school already exceeds state-recommended guidelines by more than 15 minutes. Worse for some children on Bus 23. Another mother on Hall Road goes to the school board and asks for help. She lives half a mile or so off the bus route, and her baby sitter can't drive. Her son has to walk to the bus route and stand waiting on the bus. In the rain. In the cold. Whatever. It's a big effort for the little fellow. Could the bus turn off the main route, drive up to their house to pick him up and then continue? An "extension." Board members check this out. They drive the route, time it, and decide they can do it. They tell her yes.

Fine. Except that this extension adds several minutes to the already long ride for all the other children. Sheri says it adds 10 minutes each way, 20 each day, 60 hours per year. Not fair! Why can't this mother, Sheri asks, do what all the other families do? Everyone else has to live by the rules. Why break them for one family, punishing all other children for the sake of the one? Research shows that long bus rides damage academic performance. This is a real issue.

Sheri protested at the school board meeting. Evidently the director of school transportation, Sherry Dean, and the county superintendent, Dr. Charles Chandler, both sided with Mrs. Havernewbrough. They also said the extension route was not safe for the bus. The board listened to her argument, but in the end they would not change their decision.

Probably West Virginia school policies should be followed here. For lots of reasons. But Sheri complains that the local board violated state guidelines. She wants these "recommendations" nailed down - put into solid rules, laws perhaps. So this won't happen again. Or at least that the other families on the route should get a chance to voice their opinion before the decision is made.

This ain't easy. Members of the Upshur school board are my friends and colleagues. A local surgeon. A local businessman. A school nurse and tennis coach. A college baseball coach and second-generation board member. A city councilman. Wonderful people. I would vote them all back in, next election. (Sheri would not!) Five very fine people trying to do what is right. Perhaps they did what was right. In this case, I think not. But they did it through the give-and-take of local politics. I say that in the best sense of the word. Democracy in action. But they tried to help one child at the expense of many others.

In essence they said to Sheri: "It's over. We made a decision. For better or worse, the decision was made, and it's time to move on."

"What can I do?" she asks. I tell her in a democracy we can always vote the rascals out. And that's about it. But Sheri is tenacious. She plans to take this to the state school board. She asks me to write this for the Gazette.

"But," I asked her, "isn't the school year almost over?" Meaning, what is to be gained by continuing the struggle? I want to tell her, "Sheri, you have won a victory without even knowing it. You have made a point, and the board has heard you." I very much doubt if they will do this again. Too much trouble. Too much chance another Mrs. Havernewbrough will show up and complain.

And by putting this in the Gazette, you may save another board from making the same "mistake." Sheri says: "No, I did not win. My kids lost. The year is over and they were academically injured by the school board."

The shadows of the late afternoon sun were longer now and more horizontal. "Come out and see the frogs in our lily pond," I invite her before she leaves for Hall Road.

June 5, 2007

United Methodist Women

The United Methodist Women of West Virginia asked me to serve as a teacher for their annual School of Christian Missions on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College. I could not have been more proud to serve those women.

I have a special interest in the UMW because of the strong role Methodist women played in the mission to India. My wife, Judy, graduated from a mission high school in India 50 years ago, and we will join her 50th Woodstock class reunion in San Jose, California, in August.

Judy grew up in Lucknow, where her father was the preacher at the Lal Bagh Methodist Church in that city. Lucknow is famed, at least in my mind, because the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 focused on that city - an early step toward Indian independence from the British Raj - and because today Lucknow is the home of Isabella Thoburn College, the first college for women in India, one of the first in all of Asia.

In 1869 the Women's Foreign Missionary Society was formed in Boston. It sent two female missionaries to India: Isabella Thoburn, an educator, and Clara Swain, a medical missionary. That was the beginning of today's United Methodist Women. But of course the story of women in the church is as old as that of Mary and Martha, colleagues of Jesus.

The first meeting of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society was called by Mrs. Clementina Butler, wife of the Rev. William Butler, founder of the Methodist mission to India, and by Mrs. Lois Parker. Judy has a book written by and signed by the Rev. Butler, "The Land of the Vedas." The book was given to Judy's grandparents, Methodist missionaries to India and friends of Clementina and William.

In a world where women were held in low esteem, a college for women was unheard of. So the work of Isabella Thoburn was revolutionary in that society. And the college she founded continues to serve Indian Christian women to this day.

From the beginning, the women of Methodism were revolutionaries. Their early focus was on changing the lives of women and girls in foreign lands. In America, they worked to better the lives of racial and ethnic minority women and girls. And they struggled to improve the lives of men and women whose lives were sacrificed to the sweat shops of early industrial capitalism. Of course they worked as lay members of the church until Methodists ordained the first women clergy in 1956, half a century ago. Two thousand years late, many would say.

In their statement of purpose today, the United Methodist Women proclaim themselves "an advocate for the oppressed and dispossessed with special attention to the needs of women and children." Moreover, they tell us that "true to our Wesleyan heritage, mission cannot be solely charity, but involves empowerment and advocacy for social change." Friends, that's code for "revolution."

Today these women assume a leadership role in the struggle for social justice. They take responsibility for such issues as economic and environmental justice, monitoring voter rights, peace advocacy, civil liberties, "green" issues, immigration and the rights of immigrants, globalization, farm workers, rights of women and children - to name just a few.

For all of that, I hesitate to put myself into the language trap in which Jesus put Himself, criticizing Martha for doing women's work and praising Mary for a higher calling. Later, near the end, He told His disciples what they should do to serve the Kingdom. "Feed my sheep," He told them. Hey, that's what Martha was doing, for crying out loud.

Countless Methodist and Baptist and Catholic women make the church run. They raise money to pay the preacher with their bean suppers and cookie walks. They are the very backbone of the modern church. What are they doing if not feeding the sheep? Let's not forget them as we praise the "social activists."

August 8, 2007

Scouts

I am writing these words on the last day of July and the first day of August 2007. One hundred years to the weekend since Lord Baden Powell took 21 boys on a camping trip on a Brownsea Island in England. That camping trip marks the beginning of a movement which today claims 38 million Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts/Guides in 216 countries.

The trip was organized by Robert Baden-Powell, a hero of the British-Boer War in South Africa. "B-P," as he became known, had endured - in 1899-1900 - a Boer (Dutch) siege of the South African village Mafeking, earning his popularity and hero's fame in the process.

He was named and recognized as "Lord" Baden-Powell by the Prince of Wales at the World Jamboree in England in 1929.

I write these words because of the earth-shaking effect Lord B-P had on the millions of boys and girls in those many Scouting countries, and because of the earth-shaking effect his movement, his spirit, his influence, his guidance had on my own life.

I ask you to reconstruct that first event, that monumental camping trip which led me, a 12-year old boy, to go camping at Camp Jayhawk near Ozawie, Kansas, a week in the hills and woods of eastern Kansas which forever changed and ordered my life. And which changed the lives of many women and men who read these words today.

While an officer in the British Army - in India and in South Africa - B-P had written a book on wilderness survival for the British Army, an excellent text on the topic, written for military purposes. So interesting and so well written was this little text that younger boys started reading it, and the leaders of various boys' organizations - especially the British Boys' Brigade - started using the pamphlet to organize and train the youngsters in their groups and organizations.

B-P revised the booklet, removing the military aspect.

And published it for purposes of boys' organizations. Whereas the Boys' Brigade had relied heavily on military drill, Lord Baden-Powell's idea was to form patrols, small units with elected boy leaders. That idea had a major impact on the Scouting movement. I was a member of the Black Panther patrol in my Scout troop in Topeka.

That first pamphlet, "Aids to Scouting," evolved into "Scouting for Boys," which eventually became the "Boy Scout Handbook" - the book I read and used more than 50 years ago. "Scouting for Boys," by the way, is today the fourth largest-selling book in the world!

To test the methods developed in the book, B-P took these 21 boys "of mixed social backgrounds" down to the southern coast of England, onto the Brownsea Island in a small harbor off the coast of Dorset. Because that event had such a monumental effect on so many lives - including countless Gazette readers - I ask readers to look at a map of southern England, Poole Harbor off the coast of Dorset. There it began. There our lives were forever changed. A little island in a little harbor. The first Scout camp for boys.

It all began with the idea of survival in the wilderness. But quickly Scouting became more than that. It became a moral ideal, a training for good citizenship, for responsibility and leadership within the community. And there was to be no preaching. The system of education taught in Scouts is one of guidance, learning through self-discipline and self-motivation, with achievable goals - in the visible form of badges - tugging at the boy's heart. Scouts make a promise and follow their law: "On my honor, I will do my best."

"Do a good turn daily," is the Scout slogan. When Chicago newspaper publisher W. D. Boyce visited London in 1910, he got lost in the fog. According to legend, he was helped by a young boy. When Boyce offered a tip, the boy refused. "It is my duty," the boy replied. "Do a good turn daily. I am a Boy Scout." That so impressed Mr. Boyce, that he contacted Lord Baden-Powell and brought the idea back to America.

Today in America more than 100 million men are former Scouts.

The idea and the ideals soon attracted girls and the leaders of organizations for girls in the USA. Juliette Gordon Lowe founded the Girl Scouts of America two years after Boyce founded the Boy Scouts.

On March 12, 1912, Ms. Lowe met with 18 girls in Savannah, Georgia, to found the GSUSA. She created the program based on the principles of Robert Baden-Powell, with skills, awards, value training, and self-esteem as the central ideas of her program.

Today Girl Scouts claims nearly three million members, with nearly one million adult leaders.

"Hip! Hip! Hurray!" we used to say at the end of our campfires.

Let's say it again.

August 14. 2007

Woodstock '57

Fifty years. Five Zero. Half of one century. On the first day of August, Judy and I flew from Charleston to San Jose, California, then drove south to Asilomar State Park near Monterrey. There, on the Pacific coast, 26 members of the class of 1957 gathered to celebrate their graduation from Woodstock High School in India. Twenty-nine students graduated 50 years ago from that school in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains, most of whom appeared for the weekend retreat.

Woodstock School had its origin in 1854, when a company was formed to educate Protestant girls living in India, the children of missionaries, government employees, and military brats. The company was a joint project by British officers of the Raj and by two American missionaries.

In 1922, the school became co-educational, international, and interracial.

I was the fly on the wall in California. As one of 15 husbands and wives of these 26 alumni, I was privy to their celebration. It was not your ordinary high school reunion.

Asilomar State Park is a former YWCA camp, transformed into state property when the "Y" needed to sell it in 1956. Big lodge with fireplace burning 24/7 in the cool California summer, the park can serve more than 700 guests in a single day. But the nature of the park is a clue to the nature of the reunion. Three days together, hidden from the toils of the world, a time to renew old friendships and share in the love they hold for each other.

The 26 came from as far away as Alaska and South Carolina, West Virginia and New Brunswick. They gathered in California because the last reunion, their 45th, was held on the eastern side of America, in a similar camp in Asheville, North Carolina.

The highlight of the weekend was what they called "Ten minutes of Fame," a time for each alum to tell his or her story: life in the past 50 years, the years after graduation.

They told of children and grandchildren, of careers, successes and failures, joys and pains, disease and health issues, death of loved ones, drugs and family pain, and yes, divorce.

Most answered the question, "Tell three things you want to do before you die!" Yes, we now speak of the end, and we know the next time we gather some will probably not be alive. "I want to crack 100," one golfer replied to the lugubrious question. "I have achieved all I wanted to achieve, and I just want to sit back and enjoy my final years," answered another. All told, 26 stories covering a half-century each.

That's a lot of years.

Of course there was a talent show. Judy Carpenter read some of her haiku poetry. Esther, Ruthie, and Marian sang "I'm just a girl who can't say no," and Nick played the mandolin.

Larry C., class president, presided over the business meeting. Don read the minutes of the last meeting, dated April 1957 - minutes that Esther had preserved. After the minutes were approved, the group went on to new business - the Cuneiform Peace sculpture.

At the 45th reunion, Jim Havens, a sculptor and member of the Class of 1957, offered to give Woodstock School an 8-foot, stainless-steel sculpture he had created - the symbol for "peace" written in cuneiform, the world's oldest written language - on the condition that the class would provide transportation from Ohio to northern India, and that the school would accept the piece. Since that time, the school graciously accepted the offer, and members of the class provided the money and the significant effort to move "Peace" to Woodstock School. Today, Cuneiform Peace rests on the Peace Plaza at the front of the institution, and members of the Class of 1957 proudly claim it as their gift to the beloved school.

Don Emerson, professor at Stanford and member of the Woodstock Class of 1957, led a discussion on the nature of our world today. The discussion raised the question, "Are civilizations clashing?"

Is the better interpretation of our world today presented by Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory or by Frank Fukuyama's "end of history" argument?

We sang the old school songs, all written by Robert Flemming, Himalayan biologist and Woodstock teacher. They were motivational and inspirational, very "camp" and very "upward and onward" in tone.

We made a circle and sang "Shadows," words to which bring tears to everyone's eyes.

And then it was over.

August 22, 2007

New Plan

On August 20, Judy drove me to our daughter's home near Cleveland, and Jennifer drove me down to Cleveland Clinic. A strong, male nurse lifted me out of the car and into a wheelchair. He wheeled me into the emergency room. I had to ask another male nurse to help me use the toilet.

At home the previous week, I had graduated from cane (I call it my mountain-climbing stick or my shillelagh) to walker, and finally to the wheelchair I inherited from my father. I was not doing very well even in the wheelchair. I had fallen twice from that vehicle, once trying to move myself from chair to bed, a distance of about 18 inches. Judy was not in the room, but I was able to claw myself back up onto the bed.

Anyway, it was a soft landing on carpet.

When the nurse at the clinic asked me why I was there, and what I wanted them to do, I replied, "I want to walk again." She wrote that down. That evening, I met with two young neurologists. Both promised that I would walk again.

The clinic admitted me at midnight, and on Tuesday morning a young woman in a white jacket walked into my hospital room, shook my hand, introduced herself as Dr. Rebecca Kuenzler, and announced, "I want to be your doctor." I thanked her. A tear welled in my eye.

Dr. Kuenzler was accompanied by a coven of younger - and very international - men and women. I asked her to introduce the others, all interns or residents. They came from as far away as Egypt, Lebanon, Romania, Taiwan, Korea, India, Mexico, and Ohio. That afternoon the clinic gave me a big intravenous dose of gamma globulin.

In January and again in April, Judy and I had made trips to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. That is a lovely facility with some of the world's top physicians. But it is many miles from Buckhannon, and now with me in a wheelchair, it was no longer practical to make it my medical base.

At Cleveland, I was wheeled to a small room where physicians poked me with needles and zapped me with electricity. While I was soaking up more "gammas," Dr. Kuenzler visited and announced, "I have a new diagnosis for you, and a new treatment plan." She had already studied the Mayo material and the results of my "EMG." Another tear in my eye.

The Mayo diagnosis had been "CIDP - chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy." Dr. Kuenzler's diagnosis was "MMNCB - multifocal motor neuropathy with conduction blocks." I teased her that it took me a year to learn to pronounce my Mayo diagnosis, and now she wanted to change it and make it even longer. She continued the gamma globulin treatment, but added a new pill.

Earlier this year, when I went to Mayo, my neurological syndrome had attacked only my right foot and leg. By late summer, it had moved into my left leg and arm. Dr. Kuenzler predicted that my treatment would not completely reverse the damage on the right side, but that we were early enough possibly to arrest and reverse damage on the left.

Both CIDP and MMNCB are extremely rare neurological conditions. Dr. Kuenzler asked me to visit a seminar where a student would examine me in front of the class. I am enough of a show-off that I was glad to oblige her. A medical student examined me before a class of some 25 or so physicians and students. She pushed and pulled my arms, legs, fingers, feet, and toes. With a steel instrument, she tickled the bottoms of my feet. She asked a lot of questions. She asked me if I could walk, and with a bit of help I stood up from the wheelchair and took a few steps. The "gammas" were beginning to take effect.

I am thinking, as I write these words early on a September morning, of the many years and centuries of hard and brilliant labor - research - that has gone into the phenomenon we call modern medicine. That search for healing goes back to the mythological Greek father of medicine, a fellow named Asclepios, son of Apollo, and to his daughter, Hygeia, mother of hygiene. Asclepios, by the way, walked through the Greek countryside, carrying a staff and following his pet snake. The snake was sniffing out medicinal herbs.

That staff and that snake became the symbol of the medical profession, a tribute to this Greek physician.

One must string a list of famous names to the millennial search for healing, names like Hypocrites, Galen, Leeuwenhoek, Harvey, Jenner, Barnard, Curie, Lister, Salk, Pasteur, Drew, Nightingale, Barton, and Dix. And beyond these names, a ton of men and women whose names are lost, but whose work has made it possible for the blind to see, for the crippled to walk, physicians and nurses healing patients wracked with pain and disease. And their work is far from finished.

Yesterday evening, with Judy's help and the aid of my little shillelagh, I walked half a mile on the Buckhannon River Walk. That's a miracle. That's a hard-earned miracle.

Thanks, you guys. I needed that.

September 19, 2007

Julian Bond

What you don't know is that Julian Bond hand-delivered the 1960 election to John F. Kennedy, and he did it with a clever move - like playing chess.

Bond, son of a dean at Atlanta University, an African-American of privilege, attended an all-but-one-white prep school in Pennsylvania. With Lonnie King, a boxer, star football player and Navy veteran who says his mother was a maid and who "grew up in an alley," the two of them guided the sit-in movement in Atlanta in 1960 as a follow-up to sit-ins in Greensboro and in Oklahoma. They helped to found SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee).

Bond and King gathered a dozen or so fellow students at Morehouse College and asked for service at the lunch counter at the Atlanta City Hall. They ended up in jail, and Bond had enough charges thrown at him that he feared he would spend the next 99 years in jail. As it turned out, he and his companions were out by midnight, and that is the only time he ever sat on the other side of bars.

Since 1960 was an election year, it occurred to Bond and others that it would be a good time to target the election. After working all summer to prepare for the fall sit-ins, they decided not to begin in September, the start of the school year, but to wait until the middle of October, closer to Election Day.

By that time, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had resigned from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery and had taken a position as co-pastor, with his father, at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. So Bond wanted to get Martin involved, thinking they could make this a national issue if they had King in jail.

Of course King did not want to go to jail.

He was already on probation for a trumped-up charge related to driving with Lillian Smith, a white Southern author.

And "Daddy King," an esteemed black leader in Atlanta, certainly did not want his co-pastor son to serve time for criminal activity. But try as he would, King could not say no. Bond told him, "Well, Martin, you've got to go to jail." So Martin joined the students at the lunch counter at Rich's Department Store, and into jail he went for violating his probation. He was sentenced to four months of hard labor at the Reidsville State Prison, an unheard-of punishment for a minor offense.

Bond notified Kennedy's camp and Nixon's camp. He said, King is in jail. What are you going to do about it? Nixon decided to do nothing. He needed the white Southern vote. Robert Kennedy called the judge of DeKalb County and asked him to release King. John Kennedy called Coretta and told her he was doing everything he could to release her husband.

That was the day "Daddy King" became a Democrat. The mimeograph machines started rolling. Word went out to the black community in every major city in America. And while, on November 8, 1960, the black community in Atlanta still clung to "the party of Lincoln," across America African-Americans voted for Kennedy. That little act swung the vote, and as they say, "the rest is history."

Today, Dr. Julian Bond is a college professor and member of the Georgia Legislature, where he has served for the past two decades. He is chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

On September 14, Bond spoke in the chapel at West Virginia Wesleyan College. His topic was "Crossing the Color Line: From Rhythm 'n' Blues to Rock 'n' Roll."

That may sound like an unusual topic for a man known for civil rights leadership, but Bond has been a music lover since childhood, and he more than did justice to his topic. The theme was the African and slave roots of American music.

Bond did something I have never seen in the Wesleyan Chapel.

He spoke from a complete manuscript, and he held his audience - a full house of young and old, black and white - spellbound throughout the evening. He spoke of Les Paul and Mary Ford, Charlie Parker, Bill Haley, Ray Charles, Elvis Presley, and Hank Williams. We listened to music like "Get Out in That Kitchen and Rattle Those Pots and Pans," "Shaboom," "Earth Angel" and "You Ain't Nuthin' But a Hound Dawg."

I wanted to take Judy into the aisle and show those kids how to jitterbug. Oh my, we danced to those tunes 50 years ago on our first date. Point being, American culture would be very much impoverished without the input from the black experience.

The evening ended when college President Dr. Pam Balch presented Dr. Bond with the Wesleyan Peace Award, an honor given only six times in the past - to such recipients as Jimmy Carter, Jennings Randolph, Ossie Davis, the Center for Defense Information, the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and bf maiz.

And I must say thanks to Dr. Kay Long and Dr. Rob Rupp for their work in bringing Dr. Bond to Wesleyan, to the American HEART Project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to Sen. Robert C. Byrd, and to Dr. Charles Chandler, superintendent of Upshur County Schools.

October 3, 2007

Tough Questions

Jennifer's rabbi in Cleveland told this story: He has two sons. They are both baseball fans. One of his sons loves to keep track of baseball statistics and watches carefully as the Indians play games through the summer. He can tell you who Bob Feller was, and how many seasons Feller won 20 games. The other son doesn't take an interest in baseball statistics or Indians' history, but he loves the evenings at Jacobs' Field, the crowd, the crack of the bat, the hot dogs. Now which son, asks the rabbi, is the better fan?

Judy and I look forward to the annual Lessons and Carols sung at the West Virginia Wesleyan College chapel. Worship leaders will read the Old Testament prophecies and the birth story from the Book of Luke. And our several chapel choirs will give us the most beautiful music of the year. Amongst those in the chapel there will be fine musicians capable of analyzing the music of the evening. Others not so good at music analysis will know by heart many of the hymns to be sung by the choirs and congregation. And still others could give a fine lecture on the theology of the mystery of the birth of Christ.

But most of us will just sit back and allow the choirs to fill our ears, our hearts, our souls, with heavenly music, without any thought for music analysis or theological hair-splitting. Again, who are the best participants in the evening worship? The rabbi's question is a good one.

Phil Petrosky, a friend of ours, sings in the choir every Sunday morning at our United Methodist Church. Phil told me recently that though he loves his life in the church, there are many things he does not understand. Like the resurrection, for instance.

That's not so unusual. I'm guessing that half the members of the choir would say the same thing - and members of choirs across America on any given Sunday morning. Sunday school teachers the same. Preachers, I am guessing, the same thing. There are many more questions than answers in the literature and drama of the church.

The church hands us a lot of very tough questions. Miracles, for instance. Feeding 5,000. Walking on water. Lazarus. The choir loft is filled with doubting Thomases. And critics. But much more important than these are the questions related to the "problem of evil." The problem of Job. Why does God let good people suffer while evil people prosper, to put forth loosely the problem of Job?

Fifty years ago, Archibald MacLeish wrote a play titled "JB." JB was the good man whom God allowed to suffer. The problem of evil was outlined thusly: "If God is good, he is not God. If God is God, he is not good." In other words, if He allows evil into the world, He is not good. No good god would allow the evil we witness every day. Or perhaps God has no control over that evil. It's not His fault. Fine - but that means He is not all-powerful (He is not God).

Worse than the problem of Job is the mischief of the church itself. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the witch trials, modern "Christian nations" participating in war, sex scandals behind the cloistered walls, to name only a few.

The world is filled with skeptics and doubters. Some of these call themselves agnostics and others are out-and-out atheists. And yet I am guessing that many of these skeptics who profess great doubts regarding the mysteries of the church will take time on a Sunday evening in December to enjoy the angelic voices. "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." And that's OK.

I believe in the instructions of the American educator John Dewey. We learn by doing, he taught us. I say that because we also learn our faith by doing it. Our church sends work teams to McDowell County and to other places of need. The churches of Buckhannon send medical teams to Latin America to carry healing and good health to those who lack those benefits. Our church supports a parish ministry to those in need in Upshur County and surrounding people. And while many who guide these projects may be theologically sophisticated, many others do so in an attitude of skepticism or perhaps unbelief. And that's OK too. We learn our faith by doing it.

And if at the end we must admit we are still in the dark, we have enjoyed the life in the church without understanding it. And that's OK.

So some Sunday evening this month, I hope all of you out there in Gazette-land will spend an hour or so in the surround-sound sanctuary of Christmas music, the oratorios, the carols, the lessons, the beauty.

And if you don't understand it all, or do not believe it all, or feel much impelled to criticize it all, that's OK, too. You are participating in the life of the body of Christ. Joy to the world.

December 12, 2007

Medicare

I need to thank all of you who have paid your taxes. I have written in this column twice in the past year about the time I have spent at the Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic, dealing with a nerve syndrome which, if not treated properly, would have shriveled me up by now into a very small, furry ball.

The syndrome has not quite done that to me, although four times in the last 18 months I have had to go without the saving medication, gamma globulin, and each of those times I was downgraded into wheelchair mode and worse.

Right now, thanks to the taxes you have paid, and very much thanks to Democratic leadership in Congress over the years, Medicare has paid most of the bills for my treatment, and according to one neurologist, my costs have reached well beyond the initial six figures. That covers not only the two clinics, but also my weekly intravenous treatments at St. Joseph's Hospital in Buckhannon. Thanks.

Last November, Robert Rupp invited me to eat an evening meal with Ken Hechler and a group of political science students at a local restaurant. I told Ken I was working on a column on Medicare, and was looking for information on how the political parties voted and struggled over the issues of government-sponsored health care back in 1965. Ken grinned and gave me the name of one of his former students who has written a book on Medicare.

I called Max Skidmore in Kansas City the next day, introduced myself as a friend of Ken Hechler, and with his guidance I located his book, "Medicare and the American Rhetoric of Reconciliation." This was the story I wanted.

My doctoral dissertation had focused on the 89th Congress, the Congress elected after the Kennedy assassination, so I had read many of these stories in other forms 40 years ago. "Other forms" meaning the original debates set down in the Congressional Record.

Under the leadership of President Johnson and men like Hubert Humphrey, Mike Mansfield, and Abe Ribicoff in Congress, the Medicare-Medicaid bill easily passed - with almost all opposition coming from Republicans and Southern Democrats. On July 27, 1965, the House of Representatives passed the Social Security Act (Amendments) of 1965 (Medicare-Medicaid) with a vote 307-116. The Democrats voted 237-48, and the Republicans voted 70-68. The 48 nays on the left side of the aisle came almost entirely from Southern Democrats. On the next day, the Senate Democrats supported Medicare-Medicaid 57-7 (again Southern votes in opposition) while the Republicans opposed it 17-13. To sign the bill, President Johnson flew to Independence and joined Harry Truman for the ceremony.

Even those Republicans who voted "yea" on the final passage had fought tooth and nail to defeat the bill that today provides medical care to the aged and indigent - and that pays for the medication to keep me from complete paralysis.

You have all read that while we in America brag on our medical system, and many believe we have the best medical care in the world, the fact is that we rank very low when compared to other industrialized nations. In fact, we rank 24th in the world in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality (37th by another measure). Twenty-fourth! That's terrible.

And we spend more per capita on health care than any other nation in the world.

Here's a nice quote from an officer of the World Health Organization: "Basically, you die earlier and spend more time disabled if you are an American compared to most other advanced countries." How can we explain that?

If you count yourself within the category of "upper middle class," not to worry. For me and my family, thanks to my employment at the college, and now to Medicare and AARP, I do believe we receive the very finest medical care in all the world. I am deeply indebted to the Mayo and Cleveland clinics, and to our own family physician, Dr. John Mathias.

And I am very much indebted to the nursing staff at St. Joe's. Thanks, you guys.

We fall short of those measures because of the millions of Americans that our health system fails to reach: the rural poor, minorities, teen mothers, the elderly poor, the unemployed, infants and children, employees in a small business. And frankly, many middle-income Americans also cannot afford health insurance. If you can shrug your shoulders and whisper to yourself, "Thank God I am not one of those," you have nothing to worry about. This wonderful health system will care for you.

Many Republicans in Congress, as the numbers show, joined their Democrat colleagues in final passage of the Social Security Act of 1965. However, they did so for opposite reasons.

The Democrats truly wanted to pass something close to universal health care. They wanted, in their arguments in Congress, to reach the elderly and the poor.

Not so on the right hand side of aisle. Republicans voted for the bill only because they could see which way the wind was blowing. They did everything in their power to block and prevent the Social Security Act (Amendments) of 1965 from becoming the law of the land. But when it became inevitable, they put their names to the legislation. And those motivations guide our politics of health care even today.

January 9, 2008

The Health Care System in America

I don't want to sound "preacherly," but let's tell the truth. The motivation to heal the sick and provide sight for the blind comes directly and undisputedly from a religious foundation.

When I call St. Joseph's Hospital here in Buckhannon and the operator puts me on hold, a kind voice tells me "We are inspired by the love of Christ to provide our community with quality health care in ways which respect the God-given dignity of each person and the sacredness of human life." Those are not empty words. The health care system in the Western world is a direct outgrowth of the mission of the Christian church, the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. That mission has been corrupted.

Somehow a lot of people got it backward, believing that health care is a commodity to buy, something which the rich can afford and the poor can go without. That is not an adequate understanding of good medicine or proper health care. And I must report that it is the health professionals, and most of all the American Medical Association, which have guided us down a truly corrupt path of making good health a thing to purchase in the market place. The pharmacies, the hospitals, the doctors (I exclude nurses from this list), the insurance companies have done this to us. No! That is cheap. That does us all a disservice, and it is a shameful interpretation of the ministry of healing.

We are better than that. This is a nation of overwhelming wealth. We are a people of vast resources, both natural and human.

"O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesty above the fruited plain." That is our nation. We are not first of all a market place.

We are a great society, rich beyond measure. We do not have to sell good health to the top buyer. Good health is the rightful possession of all who call themselves American, and for those who are denied that gift which is theirs by nature, good health has been stolen from them.

The story of the search for universal health care, medical assistance for all Americans, has unfortunately pitted the health care profession, the American Medical Association, against the policy of good health for all. It is a story of shame.

The search for universal health care is very much tied up with the struggle for the larger ideal of "social security." It is an idea discussed some two centuries ago by Thomas Paine, in an essay titled "Agrarian Justice." In Germany, Otto von Bismarck took the first giant step when he created the world's "first modern social welfare system" - a retirement plan for older workers, in 1883. Universal health care was a major plank in the movement of social reformers in the early years of the 20th century in America. The labor movement has continually fought for health care for American workers.

In 1909 the White House Conference on Care of Dependent Children searched for a form of social security and health care beyond the market place. Leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, Frances Perkins, and New York Gov. Al Smith guided us in the search for health and security in the early years of the 20th century.

In 1914 the AMA started down the right path, creating its own Social Insurance Committee to consider compulsory governmental health insurance. But by 1918 the AMA changed its mind, dismissed its committee leaders and started a campaign against universal health from which it has never since wandered. The AMA did not want universal health. Then or now. For 90 years the AMA has stood firm with those who consider good health a commodity to purchase in the market place. They have lost their bearings. And we are the worse for it.

In 1920 the AMA adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, That the AMA declares its opposition to the institution of any plan embodying the system of compulsory contributory insurance against illness, or any other plan of compulsory insurance which provides for medical service to be rendered contributors or their dependents, provided, controlled or regulated by any state or federal government."

From that day forward the AMA has been the enemy of good universal health.

The AMA fought Franklin Roosevelt as he guided the nation to adopt the Social Security Act of 1935. The AMA fought Harry Truman in his search for health care legislation, calling "socialized medicine" the sign of "decadence." The AMA fought John Kennedy as he attempted to guide Congress toward universal health care, and again opposed Lyndon Johnson in his (at last) successful bid to pass the Medicare and Medicaid legislation. They attacked Jimmy Carter as he proposed a national health system.

The struggle is not over. We all witnessed the severe attacks on Hillary Clinton as she tried, under her husband's administration, to move the nation closer to universal health care. And it is certain that these same forces are just keeping their powder dry, waiting to level the guns at Mrs. Clinton once she emerges as the candidate for the Democratic Party.

Today, because of the misanthropic leadership of the AMA, our national health care system lags far behind the other nations of the industrialized world. We rank 24th in life expectancy and infant mortality - not because of bad doctors but because our health care system is closed to many "les miserables" of our nation, minorities, rural poor, teenage mothers, elderly poor, unemployed, and many middle income Americans who cannot afford good health insurance. Surely we can do better than that. But we need better leadership from the AMA.

January 25, 2008

Economic Policy

"Liberals like to tax and spend." I see that just about every day.

My conservative friends tell me the Bush-McCain tax breaks for the gluttons are OK, because the money trickles down. I've heard that one before, and it is not true.

When you get pegged as a "liberal," you draw the Republicans like honey draws ants. These "conservatives" want to straighten you out, to help you see the errors in your ways. With me, they've got a lot of straightening to do.

Recently my Republican friends (I do have some) have wanted to straighten me out on my beliefs about economic policy. Turns out I am one of those naive liberal (redundant adjectives) guys who like to "tax and spend."

"Don't you know," they ask, "that when you cut taxes you stimulate the economy? And when you stimulate the economy, everybody benefits. The pie gets bigger, and those poor souls at the bottom of the system benefit more than when you "tax and spend. And government revenues grow bigger." No, I did not know that.

Funny thing. I keep thinking you need to tax before you spend. Our struggling government has a lot of bridges to mend, teachers to pay, veterans to heal, energy resources to explore, things like that. I keep wanting us to pay for what we buy. My conservative friends tell me we can pay better if we cut taxes, stimulate the economy, raise revenue by giving the fat cats more money to hire more minimum-wage suckers and illegal immigrants. I am really naive in that regard.

I did not major in economics in college. Frankly, I never took a course in business or economics. A lot of you already knew that. You don't want to listen to me when it comes to money matters. But I did get an A in reading when I was in the third grade, and I have attempted to apply that skill to my daily life.

So I thought, if those guys are right, perhaps we should vote for Republican tax cuts and give the money to the people who really matter, the ones at the top of the pile. Perhaps my conservative friends are right. I confuse "taxes" with "revenue." I keep thinking the government needs to tax us before it spends. I get confused.

Not only did I learn to read in the long ago, I learned to punch keys on a computer more than four decades ago, and I often apply reading skills to electronic words. So I went to Ask and Yahoo and Google Web sites and asked this question: "Does cutting taxes increase government revenue?" I got some positive answers from organizations that like to call themselves "freedom this" or "freedom that." Propaganda agencies for the Republican Party. But then, as I scrolled down the list, I found some disquieting reports.

Do you remember the Ronald Reagan plan to push the money up to the top? Came to be known as the "trickle-down" theory, and I don't know whether he ever used that term or if it was his critics who called it by that name. Cynics! Theory was that the little guys at the bottom would all benefit when the money served at the top "trickled down" to the bottom. Actually, that didn't happen. The rich just got richer, and the poor got what they deserved. More poverty. "They are poor because they are lazy," my Republican friends tell me. OK.

Remember David Stockman? He was Reagan's budget director. A real Republican. He was an insider, a member of the team. He wrote a book titled "The Education of David Stockman." Don't listen to me, but please hear what Stockman has to say about "trickle-down" economics: "Reagan's tax increases fell mainly on consumers, low- and middle-income people. Sales and excise levies. Reagan didn't call these taxes. They were, in his euphemistic lexicon, 'user fees' and 'revenue-enhancers.'"

"The most important issue though is that even if you take the Reagan 'trickle-down' policy at face value it's still horribly flawed as a policy that will provide economic growth that benefits all Americans," Stockman continues.

"Do you realize the greed that came to the forefront?" he asked with wonder. "The hogs were really feeding. The greed level, the level of opportunism, just got out of control." This is Stockman talking, folks, not John Warner.

So now we've got presidential contender John McCain telling us the Bush tax cuts have increased government revenue. Folks, that's not true. That's another Republican lie. When I asked Yahoo about the Bush tax cuts, here is Mr. Yahoo's answer: The "Congressional Budget Office, the Treasury Department, the Joint Committee on Taxation, and the White House's Council of Economic Advisers all disagreed with that theory, saying that tax cuts may spur economic growth but they lead to revenues that are lower than they would have been if the cuts hadn't been enacted." Please read again the list of agencies reporting on this issue. Mostly Republican appointees.

So I'm having a really hard time believing my Republican friends. I still think I am right. So does the Congressional Budget Office, the Treasury Department, etc. You can't cut taxes if you're going to mend bridges, heal veterans, and pay teachers.

Sorry!

February 15, 2008

Freedom Summer

In February, our church recognizes Black History Month. As an adult Sunday school teacher, I decided to show the Mississippi story, using an "Eyes on the Prize" video.

I used a couple of those videos in my American Minorities classes at Wesleyan College before I retired. This one tells the story of the summer of 1964, the season called Freedom Summer.

How much things have changed since those unbelievable days, with an African-American seeking the highest office in the land, and other African-Americans guiding our foreign policy, our NFL football teams, our military policy, and our golf tournaments. It seems normal now. White and black young people date each other and marry each other, and we don't blink an eye. Children don't know the difference.

It wasn't always that way, and it didn't happen by chance, but the summer of 1964 was pivotal in turning from the terrible racism that followed the Civil War.

Of course racism persists today, but it is not the same.

It was pretty much by accident that I became involved in Freedom Summer. This was one of those happy accidents that shaped my life, an accident for which I will be eternally grateful.

After I graduated from Baker University, a little Methodist college in Kansas, I was admitted to Boston University School of Theology. I felt the pull of that wonderful university because several of my professors at Baker had earned their doctorates at BU, and I wanted to see the world.

The "accident" of which I speak was that two of the three roommates assigned to Room 415 shaped my life and gave me a sense of direction from which I have never recovered. Woodie White, an African-American from New York City, and Ed King, a tall, white fellow from Vicksburg, Mississippi, made "all the difference."

Some of you who read these words will know that Woodie is now a United Methodist bishop, and some of you have heard him preach. For a time, before he was elected bishop, Woodie was chairman of the Racial Justice Committee of our national church. Woodie used to look behind my ears to see if the hayseeds were all brushed off.

Ed had chosen to live on the front lines of the civil rights movement. While in seminary, and while he was my roommate, Ed was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for eating with a mixed group in a black neighborhood, was locked up in the city jail, assaulted while there, and later tried for some trumped-up charge. After seminary, Ed became chaplain of Tougaloo College in Mississippi, one of the Methodist Church's African-American colleges. It was Ed and Woodie who drew me into political activism. Me, with the hayseeds.

In 1963, a young African-American man named Robert Moses decided to make a difference. A graduate of Hamlin College in Minnesota, Robert took himself to the boon docks of Mississippi, moved in to live with a farmer and NAACP leader named Amzie Moore, and started a plan that soon became known as the Mississippi Summer Project. Under his leadership, several civil rights organizations joined forces to change Mississippi.

And America.

Most significantly, the plan was to bring approximately 1,000 college student volunteers down from the North to develop Freedom Schools and register African-Americans to vote. That, in a land where the minority white population controlled the political system - where the majority was black, but not a single African-American was registered to vote. That, in a land where racism was the official policy of the Citizens' Council and the Ku Klux Klan.

The National Council of Churches, in an effort to make the presence of the church effective among the young civil rights workers, sent a letter to ministers across the nation, asking for volunteers to serve as chaplains to the movement.

In response to that call, I, then a Methodist minister in Livermore Falls, Maine, drove my little, blue Volkswagen down to Jackson, Mississippi, received a weekend of training, and was assigned to serve as chaplain to a group in Laurel, Mississippi.

I arrived at Laurel on August 4, the day they found the bodies of three civil rights workers buried under a dam near Philadelphia, Mississippi. The three young men had been killed earlier in the summer in an attempt to frighten others away. That murder, in fact, strengthened the resolve of those who had committed to the Summer of Freedom.

Needless to say, the events in Mississippi played a very large role in passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Today, we are able to consider an African-American as a candidate for president - because of the summer of 1964 and the sacrifice made by James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, three young men who gave all they had so that we could know the sweet victory of justice four decades later. Thanks, you guys.

February 27, 2008

A House Divided

You don't know about the College of Emporia. That, for one thing, is because it does not exist. It was an obscure little campus in an almost obscure little Kansas town out on the plains, out in Bluegrass Country, out on the Flint Hills on the Great Plains of America. But if you went to school in the days gone by; if you went to school when I went to school, you probably read two essays - some time before you graduated from junior high - by one of America's most powerful small town editors: William Allen White. William Allen White was Emporia's most famous citizen. He was Kansas' most famous citizen.

You should know about the College of Emporia if for no other reason than that it was William Allen White's college, his undergraduate school before he went on to study journalism at the University of Kansas. William Allen White was a powerful force in the Republican Party back in the early years of the 20th century, and he was a personal friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt often stayed at the White home when he traveled across the country. Later he was a friend of FDR.

Emporia was definitely a Republican town, but it was a stop on the Santa Fe route to California, and as such there was a community of Mexican families living near the tracks, families of the men who worked on the railroad. That was the Democrat section of town.

William Allen White first made a name for himself and for his little hometown in 1896, when he wrote an editorial for the Kansas City Star titled "What's the Matter with Kansas." That's a title reintroduced four years ago by Thomas Frank, who asked the same question.

The two essays I read as a young scholar were "Mary White," his eulogy written for the funeral of his daughter, killed when her horse ran under the low branch of a tree.

And an essay titled "To an Anxious Friend," a Pulitzer Prize winning essay written in defense of free speech.

I taught sociology at the College of Emporia from September 1967 until July 1970. Yes, those were the fateful years of the 1960s. The college was on its way down, and closed its doors a few years after I moved to West Virginia. Little did I realize how tenuous was the survival of that little school.

The college was a conservative institution. The administration and the college faculty were, for the most part, very provincial native Kansans. I confess that I, though a Kansan, was seen as an outsider. My graduate degrees were from Boston. I was left of center in all that I did and said. So I attracted a lot of students caught up in the chaos and the turmoil of the late 1960s. We played guitars, listened to Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and the Weavers. We marched for peace and freedom, and participated in the civil rights movement. We opposed the war in Vietnam. I was popular with the students, but definitely not with the administration or most of the faculty. I learned that I was on the short list for dismissal. I didn't care.

In 1968, a senator from Minnesota, Eugene McCarthy, stepped forward and offered an alternative to the war mongering politics of Washington. Judy and I joined the McCarthy campaign, and volunteered to walk the streets of Omaha and Nebraska City on two consecutive weekends prior to the Nebraska primary. That decision turned out to be fortuitous for us.

On one of those lovely warm April weekends the students at the college decided to hold a "Love In." What that meant was a party in Peter Pan Park, named for Mary White, William Allen White's daughter. Judy and I were invited to the "Love In," but we could not attend. We had committed to the McCarthy campaign. Turns out that some of the students smoked "grass" at the Love In, and the college administration sent a photographer to record the event for posterity. Three faculty members attended the party, and when the camera showed up, everyone gathered to get in the picture. Like, "we don't care if you take our picture," we have nothing to hide. I think some students even showed their "weed" between thumb and forefinger for the camera.

And the three members of the faculty were among them, but certainly not smoking! Surprise, surprise! Three members of the faculty were given their walking papers. And I was not among them.

Early in 1968 Eugene McCarthy nearly whipped Lyndon Johnson in the New Hampshire primary, and Johnson opted out. One April afternoon a student asked me if I had heard that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. On June 6, Judy and I were camping with our children in Mesa Verde National Park, when we overheard the car radio in the next tent site over - reporting that something had happened to Robert Kennedy. We pricked up our ears, turned on our own car radio, and heard the tragic news.

The Democrats held their convention in Chicago that year. Jerry Rubin and the Yippies gave them all a hard time. They played havoc in Chicago's Lincoln Park, fought with the police, nominated a pig for president, and they secretly got themselves invited to help serve a fancy dinner to Democrat dignitaries. At a given moment they all stripped their clothes off and, naked, carried into the dining room the raw heads of newly decapitated hogs. The fine ladies and gentlemen were not amused.

The Democrats were divided. The peaceniks wanted Gene. "All we are saying," they sang, "is Give Peace a Chance." "Clean with Gene," they promised. The Old Guard nominated Hubert Humphrey. In doing so, the divided party did, in effect, elect Richard Nixon, what with the peace party just staying home in November.

I tell this story because I see its reflection in the mirror of today. The Democrats are divided again, and hardball politics is taking over. It's getting nasty out there, and each side is determined to have its own way. If my candidate is not nominated, I just won't vote. John McCain, here is the election, handed to you on a platter. Sing along with me: "Those were the days, my friend, I thought they'd never end."

March 28, 2008

The Social Creed

You might think that the one place in the world safe from the storms of politics and political ambitions would be the church. You might think that, of course, only if you had never involved yourself in the life of the Body of Christ.

From the beginning, life in the church has involved struggle and strife. From the beginning, good men and women have held differing opinions regarding what we ought to do and what we ought to believe. No less today than in the past. Since the day when Peter and Paul struggled over the issue of circumcision, we have argued and debated issues.

In no small way did Dan Brown's book, "The Da Vinci Code," portray what all of us who studied theology learned in our introductory lessons. Life in the church is no easy matter. Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Simonianism, Nicolaitanism, Marcionism, Arianism, millennialism, you name it, these and countless other doctrines all challenged the beliefs of orthodoxy, and of course "orthodoxy" was none other than the vote of the majority.

Our United Methodist brothers and sisters recently gathered in Fort Worth to deliberate issues before the church in the 21st century. We gather every four years, the same years as Americans elect our presidents, and the same years as the world's greatest athletes gather to compete in the quadrennial Olympic games. Today, more than ever, the General Conference brings to one location church leaders from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australia, and Europe to join with American brothers and sisters to guide the church international.

High on the list of controversies is our statement on social issues, a document we have called "The Social Creed" for the past 100 years, and the "Social Principles" we adopt every four years. My own copy of the 1908 Methodist Episcopal Church Discipline is one of the treasured documents in my collection of artifacts. Therein lies the original document that has guided the social thought of our church over the past century.

In our first Social Creed, 100 years ago, we affirmed the right of workers to join together for collective bargaining. We expressed our concern for the American worker, for women abused by inhumane and immoral working conditions, for children toiling in the mines and factories of American industry, and for the "sweatshop" conditions that destroyed the health and dignity of the men and women of the working class. The 1908 Methodist Social Creed affirmed the right of workers to earn a living wage and to toil in conditions conducive to human dignity. The creed affirmed the right of workers to find relief from their labors one day out of seven, and "the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills."

The Social Creed grew out of a movement within the church known as the Social Gospel, a growing concern in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the evils of crime, inequality, poverty, liquor, slums, poor hygiene, inadequate education, racial tensions, and the dangers of war. The Social Gospel movement was led by such men as Charles Sheldon who coined the phrase, "What would Jesus do?"; Frank Mason North, who wrote the hymn, "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"; and by Walter Rauschenbusch.

Today the United Methodist Church continues to encourage efforts to end evils we find in society, though the issues have changed over the years. Today our Social Creed affirms the principles of equality for all people, the liberation of women, the rights of the aging and the disabled. We affirm the importance of the search for world peace, for "the rule of justice and law among nations, and ... individual freedom for all people of the world." We support those who seek to protect the natural environment of the planet; we encourage responsible consumption and the elimination of economic and social distress.

"We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement and faithful use by humankind," the modern creed affirms. This is the Social Gospel and the Social Creed. Our deliberations and our actions are guided by our General Board of Church and Society.

Of course the United Methodists are not alone in working for social justice. Most other Protestant denominations, plus Jewish and Catholic agencies, are working for similar goals. The Catholic commitment to social justice is strongly illustrated in the papal encyclicals, "Mater et Magistra" and "Pacem in Terris."

Not all agree with these goals. Not all believe that the church should make these social evils the focus of its concern. Attacking our church from the right end of the religious-political spectrum are three organizations: the Good News movement, the Confessing Movement, and the Institute on Religion and Democracy. These right-wingers want to disrupt deliberations of our General Conference and turn the church in a new direction - away from issues of social justice. They are bringing legal action against the General Board of Church and Society in an effort to terminate our work for social justice so central to the ministry of United Methodists.

Life in the church has never been easy; knowing what to do and what to believe has always been a challenge. No less today than in the first century, the Body of Christ is a political body, and its deliberations are always a struggle. Yet in all of this, we believe in divine guidance through struggle.

May 19, 2008

The Race Card

Dawn Miller, Gazette editorial page editor, wrote of the ubiquitous nature of racism in America. It's everywhere. I used to tell my students, "If you swim in the water, you get wet." So when others accuse West Virginia of racism at the voting booth, they have no leg to stand on. As Dawn points out, however, that doesn't make it OK, but the point is well taken.

Racism is wider and deeper even than Ms. Miller suggests. For nearly four decades, I taught courses in American minorities. About a dozen years ago, I expanded my curriculum by adding a new course to the sociology offerings: global minorities. It had become clear to me that racism is not limited to the land of the free and the home of the brave. It is everywhere.

Not just in South Africa. The Ashkenazi of Israel look down their noses at the Mizrahim and the Sephardim. The Orthodox of Serbia look down upon Muslims. Sunni Muslims look down upon Shi'ites. Everywhere in Europe, one finds hatred towards the Roma, derisively called "Gypsies." Racism is strong and common in Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics (they treat religion here as a race) feud with one another. Spaniards don't like the Basques. African-Americans have a hard time visiting China, and the Chinese look down upon Tibetans, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos. In Rwanda, the Hutu and Tutsi have each been guilty of genocide against the other. Japanese look down upon the Burakumin and the Ainu, minority groups on that island kingdom. Not to mention Turks, Kurds, and Armenians. Not to worry. I found more than enough information on global racism, prejudice, and discrimination to fill a semester. And more!

I want to talk about the "race card" in American politics in the 20th century. No time here to talk about the many slaves owned by Thomas Jefferson or his slave-girlfriend Sally Hemings. No time to note that slaves counted as three-fifths of a person for purpose of electing representatives to Congress. Or to speak of John Brown, or of a Civil War - labeled "the War of Northern Aggression" by many today who live in the "Land of Cotton."

Or John Charles Freemont, first Republican candidate for the highest office in the land, defeated in 1856 in part, at least, because he opposed slavery. I won't mention here the Emancipation Proclamation or three Constitutional Amendments passed in the late 1860s.

Today, for good reason, the Democrats are recognized as the civil rights party. It was Harry Truman who integrated the American armed services (Executive Order 981, July 26, 1948). It was Kennedy who tried to free Martin Luther King Jr. from an Atlanta jail in 1960.

It was Kennedy, and then Johnson, who pushed for civil rights legislation in the 1960s - leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

By contrast, Nixon, and later Reagan, chose the "Southern strategy," winning the racist vote and sealing their party's claim as the party of white racists. Reagan, for instance, kicked off his 1980 presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, site of the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers, with a pledge to support "states' rights."

Since 1909, more than 200 anti-lynching laws have been proposed in Congress - without success. Franklin Delano Roosevelt wanted to support such legislation, but he was afraid to do so. When the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill came before Congress in 1935, Eleanor Roosevelt supported the bill, but her husband did not. It was opposed in the South, of course, and Richard Russell, D-Georgia, filibustered for six days.

Roosevelt refused to support the bill. He feared that he would lose the South and, therefore, the next election. He might have been right.

Truman was willing to lose the South in order to do the right thing. He signed the Fair Employment Act of 1948, and that cost him the South. Let them go, he said. They heard him and followed his advice. Many Southern Democrats bolted the party in 1948 and founded the States' Rights Democratic Party, aka the Dixiecrats, nominating Strom Thurmond for president.

That move was supposed to give the election to Tom Dewey, of course, and many Gazette readers will remember the photo of Truman holding up a newspaper the day after the election, "Dewey Wins," when, in fact, the election went to Truman, in spite of the Dixiecrats.

Race played a big role in the 1968 presidential election. George Wallace ran for president under the flag of the American Independent Party. He won nearly 10 million votes and carried five Southern states. Clearly, Wallace was the segregation candidate. "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," he vowed in 1962. It was Wallace who stood in the doorway at the University of Alabama in 1963, barring African-American students from entering the university. He is remembered also for his hatred of the hippies and his promise to teach them two new four-letter words: s-o-a-p and w-o-r-k.

Sadly, I note that I am not alone in recognizing that the race card has raised its ugly head again in the world of politics in this dawning decade of the 21st century. We still have a way to go. Ain't over till it's over, Dawn.

June 26, 2008

Two Pockets

Shortly after the United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, I received an e-mail on science and religion, a topic faced by the 982 delegates at the conference. So let me step back for a moment.

I attended college at Baker University, the oldest college in Kansas, a small Methodist school founded in 1858. I graduated in Baker's centennial year.

There I found a girl who married me, gave me three children and seven (so far) grandchildren. Judy was ensconced in Baker tradition. Her great-uncle was academic dean in the decade before we arrived. At least six other relatives attended Baker. Baker had a huge impact on me and on my wife.

Professor Suderman taught English literature when I was a sophomore, and as we came in "Paradise Lost" to the part where Satan is thrown from heaven, he made a comment that has stuck with me for more than 50 years. He said, "I keep my religion in my left pocket, my science in my right." He gestured to the pockets in his sport coat.

I was never happy with that approach to learning, but I must admit after these five decades that it has a certain virtue. That's not much more than admitting that I keep art in one pocket and music in the other. These are different types of experience: a strong faith on the one hand, accompanied by clear thinking on the other. But it's silly to think there should be a power struggle between my coat pockets.

The same God who gave us this wonderful universe also gave us our wonderful minds and the longing for holy experience.

I thought about Professor Suderman's claim as I read Jim Haught's fine May 25 column on the beauty of West Virginia, the geology of Appalachian mountains and rivers, the shifting of tectonic plates, the slow working of erosion, the waters of ancient oceans, the accumulation of crustaceous debris, and the never-ending work of evolution.

I have often thought of Professor Suderman's division of human experience as I read my bi-monthly publication, "Star Date," published by the McDonald Observatory at the University of Texas. I study the photos from the Hubble Telescope, read the descriptions of time and space - explained in light years - the black holes, cosmic phenomena, the billions of galaxies, and the absolutely awesome celestial images beyond description.

I thought about Professor Suderman's sentence when I received that e-mail from Dr. Michael Zimmerman, academic dean of Butler University, Indianapolis. Dean Zimmerman has sponsored a project that attempts to reconcile religion and science in the minds of faithful Christians.

At the United Methodist Conference, Dean Zimmerman reports, delegates overwhelmingly endorsed Petition 80990, which states: "The United Methodist Church endorses The Clergy Letter Project and its reconciliatory programs between religion and science."

Here is the statement endorsed at the conference: "Within the community of Christian believers, there are areas of dispute and disagreement, including the proper way to interpret Holy Scripture. While virtually all Christians take the Bible seriously and hold it to be authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the overwhelming majority do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook. Many of the beloved stories found in the Bible - the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark - convey timeless truths about God, human beings, and the proper relationship between Creator and creation expressed in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation. Religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

"We, the undersigned Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests.

"To reject this truth or to treat it as 'one theory among others' is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We believe that among God's good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator.

"To argue that God's loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. We urge school board members to preserve the integrity of the science curriculum by affirming the teaching of the theory of evolution as a core component of human knowledge. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth."

I read a book once entitled "Your God is Too Small." To those who want to constrict the workings of the universe to a tiny space enclosed within a few thousand years, I can only repeat the title of that book. Your God is too small.

July 14, 2008

Winning the White South

During one of the Republican presidential debates last winter, a young African-American man asked John McCain why so few African-Americans vote Republican. McCain did not have a very good answer.

Here are three stories.

On February 2, 1948, an election year, President Harry S. Truman, a vastly unpopular president at that time, spoke to the nation. "The founders of the United States proclaimed to the world our belief that all men are created equal We shall not, however, finally achieve the ideals for which this nation was founded so long as any American suffers discrimination as a result of his race, or religion, or color, or the land of origin of his forefathers." And, he continued, until "all our people have equal opportunities for jobs, for education, for health and for political expression." He called for the establishment of a new civil rights commission, for federal laws against lynching and the poll tax, for laws prohibiting discrimination on interstate trains and buses, and a fair employment commission.

At that time, the Democrats held the solid South, and Truman needed the South in an election year. But he needed one thing more. He needed integrity. He knew he might sacrifice the Southern vote with his civil rights speech. But he chose to do the right thing.

The Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan of Georgia warned that blood would be shed if Truman's civil rights program were to be passed.

Political leaders from the states we call Dixie lined up against Truman, determined to prevent him from gaining the Democratic nomination in Philadelphia that next July. Men such as Jim Folsom, Fielding Wright, Strom Thurmond, James Eastland, John Stennis, and Richard Russell.

In February, the governors of those Southern states gathered in Wakulla Springs, Florida, to map out a strategy to keep Truman off the ballot in November 1948.

The result of that speech, and Truman's determination to pass new civil rights laws, and a new civil rights plank in the party platform guided by Hubert Humphrey, and the Democrats in Philadelphia nominating Truman as the standard-bearer for the party, was the creation of a new political party, the States' Rights Party, also known as the so-called Dixiecrats. The Southern delegates to the Democrat convention in July "bolted" the party, walked out, and called their own convention, the so-called States' Rights Convention, held in Birmingham, Alabama. They named Strom Thurmond as their candidate for president. Thurmond told the convention, "States Rights Americans are ready to stand, even at the expense of life itself, as Crockett, Bowie, and Houston stood in Texas." "States' Rights" became a code word for Jim Crow society.

On June 21, 1964, three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, drove from Meridian, Mississippi, to Longdale, Mississippi, to investigate the ruins of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church, a civil rights meeting place. The church had been burned to the ground five days earlier as a warning to all who wanted to assist in the activities of "Freedom Summer." At approximately 5 p.m., the trio was stopped by Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Chaney was charged with speeding, while the other two were held for "investigation." That evening, Chaney was fined \$20. The three were held several hours and given a meal of spoonbread, peas, potatoes, and salad. At 10:30, Deputy Price released them and followed them to the Neshoba County line.

He told them not to come back.

Police found the charred remains of the blue Ford they were driving, but the civil rights workers were nowhere to be found. Local politicians claimed that the three were probably just hiding somewhere in order to cause trouble.

On August 4, the bodies of the three workers were found buried under an earthen dam on Olen Burrage's Old Jolly Farm, 6 miles southwest of Philadelphia, Mississippi. While their bodies lay beneath the soil, Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In 1980, the Republicans wanted the White House. They knew they needed the white South. They needed the George Wallace Democrats. But they couldn't just go down to Mississippi and join the Ku Klux Klan. They needed a strategy that would make them look clean.

In that context, candidate Ronald Reagan decided to visit the Neshoba County Fair. He would use the fair to kick off his bid for the White House. He gave a speech at the fair. There, in what has become hallowed ground for the civil rights movement, Reagan announced to the world, "I believe in states' rights."

Friends, there you have it. It was no accident that Ronald Reagan chose Neshoba County, Mississippi, for the first day of his campaign. He used that county fair to tell the world, I am an opponent of civil rights. And the Republicans won the white South. They still have it.

That's why John McCain did not have a good answer.

August 16, 2008

Wealth and Poverty

There's a story out there about a father-daughter conversation. Dad is one of those stingy Republicans. Daughter is an enlightened Democrat, a freshman in college who has worshiped at the feet of those lib'ral professors. The profs, of course, argue in class that the way to solve all social problems is to redistribute the wealth.

Daughter agrees, but is ashamed of her Republican father, stingy guy who wants to keep what he earned.

So Dad asks Daughter a question. "How are your classes going?"

"I'm doing OK," she answers. "My classes are really hard, and I am studying my fanny off. But I did make a 4.0 my first semester, and I might just make it again."

Dad asks one more question. "How is your roommate doing?"

"Oh Dad, she is throwing away her college education. She is one of the most popular girls on campus, invited to all the parties, but she does not study. She takes easy courses, and is often too drunk to attend her morning classes. She barely made a 2.0 last semester. She's going to flunk out if she's not careful."

To which Dad inquires, "Why don't you go to the dean and ask him to take one full point of your GPA and give it to your roommate. That way you would both have a 3.0, and she might just be able to graduate."

"Oh Dad, I couldn't do that. I have worked very hard for my grades. I wouldn't give her my hard-earned grades. Let her work for her own grades."

Dad replies, "Welcome to the Republican Party."

There's a drop of truth in that story. We live in the land of equal opportunity. We all begin our naked little lives at the same starting line.

Some of us run. Others walk. And others just loaf along. And somewhere along the track the runners start picking up their gold medals. The walkers get silver and bronze. And the loafers get nothing.

But the loafers get mad. They invent "democracy," a form of government where the loafers have the same power as the runners. They vote for "populists," otherwise known as "Democrats," who offer to redistribute the medals so that the loafers get gold medals just the same as the runners.

Next they invent universities and hire professors. The professors like the system of government called "democracy," and teach courses that support the system. They espouse philosophies that argue for "the greatest good for the greatest number," and they justify a system of redistribution where the rich runners have to give up their gold medals and share with the loafers.

Of course, you all know who I am. I am that lib'ral prof who teaches John Stuart Mill utilitarianism, "greatest good" and all that. At my retirement dinner, Wesleyan President Bill Haden wiped his brow. He was visibly relieved to see me go. He said, "It works like this: Warner writes a column for the Gazette; next morning my phone rings."

Of course he was teasing. He always supported my right to speak and write. Thanks, Bill.

In sociology we all had to study Max Weber, the great German scholar. Late 19th- and early-20th-century economist, actually. His most famous work was "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism." The Protestant ethic was a "spirit" of working hard, introduced, Weber claimed, by Martin Luther and John Calvin, 16th-century Protestant preachers.

Before the Protestant Reformation, work was considered a four-letter word. Nobody wants to work. Work, we read in the book of Genesis, is the punishment we get for Adam's Fall, influenced by Lady Eve and her friend, The Serpent.

And thus until that day in October when Luther nailed his 95 theses onto the door of a church in Germany, work was drudgery. But Luther claimed that work was joy. He preached that God has "called" us to work in the garden of life. Work is not drudgery. Work is our "secular calling," our calling into the life of work. Not just a calling to religious vocation - priesthood, etc. A calling to the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. Work is not punishment.

John Calvin expanded the idea of a "secular calling." You can't work your way into heaven. Work is not a means to earn paradise. Work is a way to say "thanks" to the One who gave us life. And each one of us, working in the garden, is building the Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." Work took on a new meaning. No longer a four-letter word.

I think many Gazette readers will know what I mean when I say that your "vocation" gives you a deep sense of satisfaction. It adds meaning to life. You work hard, but it is not drudgery. It is not punishment. That, according to Weber, is this work spirit, this spirit introduced by Luther and Calvin.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the office. Those who felt this new spirit began to get rich. They were accumulating wealth while building the Kingdom. God's Kingdom. The work spirit became a proof of salvation. And soon enough, wealth became proof of salvation. The Spirit of Capitalism.

And conversely, what do you think poverty proved? You guessed it. And the rich began to feel an unjustified religious righteousness. Today, wealth has become disconnected from hard work. We don't all start the race at the same marker. Many are given undeserved advantages, while others are born into poverty. Many work hard and cannot make ends meet. The idea of a "working poor" should be inconceivable in modern America. But it is very much with us. Educational opportunities are given to some and not others. Disease takes its toll. Broken families and child abuse do their damage.

Urban and rural ghettos destroy the idea of equal opportunity.

But among the upper regions of money and power there is still a smug belief that "I have earned all of this," while those at the bottom deserve what they get (or don't get). And sadly, there is a theological sentiment that justifies the disparities of wealth and poverty. "God has blessed me." Thank Max Weber for pointing this out.

September 10, 2008

Dirty Tricks

Here we go again. The dirty tricks. We are into early autumn of an election year, and the Republicans are pulling out all the stops. I have to ask you: Are we, on the left, as dirty as that? That is an honest question, because with my biases and all, I know I see the splinter in my brothers' eye and not the log in my own. It seems to me, though, that the right-hand side of the political landscape is the worse offender. Lie, cheat and steal. Win this election at any cost.

The lie. I'm talking about Barack Obama's airplane now. I catch this stuff, from time to time, on my little red box filled with electrons and magic words.

Anything goes on the Internet. Rumors. Lies. You name it.

This time it is the claim, coming from the right, that Barack Obama, candidate for president of the United States, has just bought an airplane with an American flag on the tail. Maverick that he is, he quickly erased that despicable flag and replaced it with a big "O." What a disgrace, the caption reads. Typical of Democrat politics. That's the lie.

Susan Wilcher, Buckhannon Democratic leader, corrected the lie in our local paper. She pointed out that the "flag" erased from the tail was actually the logo for Northwest Airlines, the company from which Obama bought the vehicle. When he repainted his plane, replacing the company logo, he painted three American flags on the newly painted plane.

No matter. The lie is out there, and friends, I just have to say, it is an absolutely typical Republican dirty trick. Tell a lie a lot of times, and a lot of people will believe it. John Kerry's Swift Boat story, for instance.

Here's another one: Barack Obama is not a U.S. citizen. He has not produced his birth certificate, and he did not wear the flag lapel pin after September 11, 2001. We Democrats are putting up a candidate who is not even a citizen. Come on, you guys. Be serious. More lies.

Here's another one. You all know, of course, that the Democratic candidate for president is actually a Muslim in disguise. Proof of this, if you don't already believe it, is the fact that he used a Koran to swear his allegiance to our sacred nation when he was admitted as a member of the U.S. Senate. I hope you know that is a lie. Not just a lie. This is filth.

The cheat. Chads, dimples, and butterflies. Most Gazette readers remember Katherine Harris's famous hat trick. Harris, secretary of state for Florida in the year 2000, declared George W. Bush the winner of the Florida election for president of the United States. She did it by discrediting 57,000 votes, most of which were from Democratic precincts, very likely mostly Democratic votes, in the Florida election. So Bush won Florida, and thus the nation, by a mere 537 votes. In Ohio the evidence is very strong that in 2004 the Republicans discounted 350,000 votes for John Kerry, enough "stolen" to have put John Kerry in the White House. Call it theft or call it cheat. Another dirty trick.

The steal. Or break into the Democrat headquarters in the Watergate Hotel, steal secrets, use those secrets to elect Tricky Dick. From what sewer do you find this scum? The right-hand side of the landscape comes up with these dirty tricks for a "higher purpose," of course. They have to protect the interests of the extremely rich and the overwhelmingly opulent. They win their votes by a religious pretense. Hey, they've all been saved.

I will just say this: Jesus was not siding with the rich guys. Blessed are the poor. Harder for a rich man to get into heaven than a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. Never mind he was referring to a little gate in the big city. The right-hand side of the landscape is not where Jesus lived. Nowhere near it. No matter. They've all been saved!

Lie, cheat and steal. Have you guys no shame?

September 15, 2008

That Other Georgia

Georgia! Great! Yea! Let's have another war! What, with unemployment rates soaring and lots of young men and women loitering in our city streets, let's send 'em to Georgia. Come on. We've held battle losses to under 5,000 in our Middle East skirmishes - so far.

Got lots of boys and girls to send overseas. Oops, I didn't count battle wounded or coalition troops. Well, we've still got lots of cannon fodder.

"Yours is not to reason why!"

Not "Georgia on my Mind." Not the Bulldogs Georgia. Not Atlanta. Not the Ramblin' Wrecks. Not "The Night They Drove Ol' Dixie Down" Georgia. Not "Gone With The Wind" Georgia. Let's send 'em overseas to the ancient kingdom to defend the integrity of one of the oldest Christian nations on the planet.

Onward to Georgia. Land of Jason's Golden Fleece. Home of Medea, Jason's girlfriend and later his enraged wife - "hell hath no fury" Medea.

Georgia. The ancient Caucasus kingdom nestled between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, a nation whose king adopted Christianity just about the same time the Nicæan Creed was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. About the same time Constantine saw the great sign in the sky, "In this Sign Conquer," and adopted Christianity for the Roman Empire.

Here a 19th-century German anthropologist and physiognomist named Johann Friedrich Blumenbach identified the origin of the so-called "Caucasian" race - "the most beautiful race of men," he claimed. Georgians. Caucasians all.

Here lived a young man named Joseph Vissarionovich Djughashvili, otherwise known to us as Joseph Stalin, mass murderer of the Soviet people. Georgia, a nation captured by an invading Soviet Army in 1922, freed from captivity in 1991.

Between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea there lies a multitude of ethnic and national language groups, "beautiful" Caucasians, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Orthodox Christians, Armenians, Russians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Mongols, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Avars - you name it. Nor do all those groups love each other. Only a few years ago, we listened daily to reports of warfare between Chechens and Russian troops, each spreading terror upon the other.

This is but a small part of the great diversity of peoples of the former colonial empire between St. Petersburg in the west and Vladivostok in the east, a land connected by the longest railroad in the world, more than 5,000 miles long. It's a land divided by 11 time zones, a land where the sun comes up in the east before it goes down in the west. The Land of the Firebird.

The land of the Matryoshka doll and the Faberge egg.

This is the land of the great stories and storytellers. Tolstoy first of all, author of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," pacifist, educational reformist, neurotic crazy fellow who drove his wife to lunacy along with him. Dostoyevsky, crazy genius, author of "The Brothers Karamazov," "Crime and Punishment," "The Idiot," a man who survived the firing squad because officials changed their mind. Solzhenitsyn, storyteller of the great prison system of the Soviet empire. Pushkin, the Shakespeare of the Russian people, hotheaded fool killed in a duel over, you guessed it, a woman. Pasternak, author of the book made into my all-time favorite movie. Sholokhov, Nobel winner with his stories of the Don Cossacks.

This is the land of the great romantic musicians. Tchaikovsky first of all, all-time greatest romantic with his "Pathetique," "Nutcracker Suite," "Swan Lake." Eugene Onegin, giving us the great "1812 Overture" commemorating the Russian victory over Napoleon nearly two centuries ago. And the Bolshoi, and Pavlova, and Baryshnikov, and Nureyev. And Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov, and Menuhin, and Rubenstein, and Shostakovich. Olga Korbut, Boris Spassky. And so we must go fight them.

Russian soldiers, and later Soviets, built an empire which captured more than 200 ethnic and national language groups, peoples who never wanted to be part of the Russian hegemony. Expanding east to the Bering Strait, south to the Bosphorus and Persia and Turkey and the Tien Shan Mountains in Central Asia, Russian military victories have now become the stones around their collective neck. In 1990 and 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, 15 new nations emerged, including Russia and Georgia. Leaving, however, another 200 national groups to yearn for their own independence. Not to be.

So that is what is happening in the little national communities of South Ossetia and in Abkhazia today. While others were breaking away, these two small national groups missed the boat. They remain trapped within the new independent nation of Georgia, home of Stalin and Medea, home of "beautiful" Caucasian men, home of an elderly Christian Church.

We must go and free them. And then the Chechens, the Azars, the Rutuls, the Tatars, the Circassians, the Eskimos, the Dargins, the Avars, the Laks and Ukrainians, the Dargins. We shall keep our children off the streets. No more loitering.

Cannon to the right.

Cannon to the left.

Let's go!

But what do we say to Sarah Palin when she takes Alaska across the famous Bridge to Nowhere? I say, bring in the Don Cossacks. Or the Light Brigade.

September 18, 2008

The Deficit

Several years ago, my younger brother Don decided he needed to expand his understanding of economics. He has an master's degree from Harvard Divinity School and an MBA from the Harvard Business School. He has been trying to educate me:

"For years, our government has been living beyond its means. Government debt grows significantly every year. It is now over \$10 trillion and is expected to increase by more than \$1 trillion in the next 12 months as a result of the subprime bailout/rescue.

"If our government were an individual or a company, creditors would have shut it off years ago. However, our government's credit has not been shut off only because there is now a global economy, and we are the world's largest consumers. The relationship between the United States and many other countries is this: They need us as customers. We need them as lenders. This relationship is referred to as a 'financial balance of terror' in the July-August 2007 Harvard Magazine article 'Debtor Nation.'

"The balance is a complex set of relationships. Nothing guarantees their continuation. If the balance is lost, our nation could be in very big trouble. Other nations could decide that despite the consequences for their own economies, it is better to stop "throwing good money after bad" because the United States, with its monstrous negative annual cash flows, could never possibly repay its debt.

"Or, a huge lender such as China might decide to punish us for political reasons, such as siding with Taiwan in a crisis with the mainland. It amazes me that while politicians now talk a great deal about reducing our dependence on foreign oil, they still say virtually nothing about reducing our dependence on foreign debt!

"It also amazes me that many people who would never consider significantly outspending their income year after year think it is somehow OK for our government to it.

"The only people I occasionally see on TV expressing concern about our huge federal deficit talk only about the negative consequence of saddling our children and grandchildren with a monstrous debt. As far as I am concerned, that is a 'best case' scenario because it assumes our creditors will continue allowing us to pile up more and more debt for another generation or two.

"The worst-case scenario is that our creditors finally say, 'No mas!' and shut off the flow of money. Taxes would then suddenly have to be increased and governmental benefits would have to be decreased dramatically. The damage to our economy would cause the value of the dollar to plummet. This, in turn, would cause skyrocketing inflation, because foreign goods would become too expensive for us. (Bye-bye, Wal-Mart). Consumer spending would drop precipitously, causing increased business failures and layoffs. The resulting additional unemployment benefits would have to be denied or more taxes collected. It would be a nightmare worse than the subprime crisis. Who would bail out our entire country? John A. Boehner, the House's top Republican, has recently been quoted as saying with regard to the subprime crisis: 'The American people are furious that we're in this situation, and so am I.' Imagine how furious the American people will be if they are told too late about the risks our country has been taking with its mountainous federal deficit.

"It is distressing to me that neither of our major-political-party presidential candidates seems to have a clue about the magnitude of the problem. 'We the people' want only promises of lower taxes and more benefits from our candidates. So that is what they give us. I ardently hope that after the election, the economic advisers of our next president are able to convince him that he needs to level with the American people about the magnitude of our federal-deficit problem and that sacrifice is going to be required of us all in order address the problem before it is too late."

October 21, 2008

In Beauty I Walked

I will never walk again. Sorry to splay those nasty words across the page, but some of you have been reading my column for more than 25 years now, and I don't need to keep secrets.

My doctors at the Cleveland Clinic have never put it in so many words. They have been talking around it, and leaving me to say the sentence. But there it is. I will never walk again. Yes, I will hobble behind a four-legged walker. And perhaps from time to time I will try to make my way across the room on my beautiful hickory shillelagh. But frankly, that's not walking. Remember the riddle the Sphinx asked Oedipus? She was talking about me!

Dr. Polston, neurologist at the Cleveland Clinic, drew a sketch for me on a scrap of paper, showing how my autoimmune system has malfunctioned, how it has misread cues and started attacking the myelin sheath which is supposed to protect my peripheral nervous system. In both legs, and perhaps arms later. He drew little darts into the sheath, and some of them penetrating into the core nerves of my legs. The damage won't go away. The best I can hope for is to slow the progress down a bit.

That's the last thing in the world I ever imagined would ever happen to me. Disability was what other people had. I was not planning to drive to the DMV in Elkins and pick up that little blue card people put up on the rearview mirror. But now we sport that card and it gets us into the finest parking places at Wal-Mart or the First United Methodist Church.

Judy drops me off at St. Joseph's Hospital twice a week now for my regular injections of gamma globulin, given to me now through a port in my chest. That won't cure me, but it gives me short-term relief. And from time to time I go in for a five-day intensive treatment. Thanks, I must add, to Medicare and my AARP insurance.

I applied for long-term-care insurance the other day, and State Farm turned me down.

Of course. I waited too long. My agent says, tell everyone you know. Apply while there is time. So, I'm tellin' ya.

So how do I deal with this? First of all, I tell myself I am no privileged character. My turn. I am not the first person to deal with disability. Nor will I be the last. It happens, and it has happened to me. Suck it up. And I can do that. If Christopher Reeve, Stephen Hawking, and Franklin Roosevelt could do it with grace, I can do it, too.

That line is famous in Kansas, by the way. "You will never walk again!" Every springtime the University of Kansas holds the Kansas Relays. The high moment in the day is the Glenn Cunningham Mile run. When he was 8 years old, Cunningham was told that he would never walk again after he suffered severe leg burns. Glenn defeated his disability and went on to break the world record in the mile.

But that is not in the cards for me.

I watch young college students run past our house or play soccer on the Wesleyan field. I watch children skip and jump. I want to call out, "Enjoy your legs." But I don't. Those days are over for me.

So how do I deal?

These legs were made for walking. I treasure my memories, and want to tell everyone I know to build good memories. I am going to give you a test right now. I am going to list some of the places these two legs of mine have taken me. It sounds like a shortened version of "1,000 places to see before you die."

Here are memories of places my legs have taken me. Betatakin Ruins, Chaco Canyon and Canyon de Chelly, Hagia Sophia, Troy, Kings Chapel, Tofino, Empress Hotel, Cheops, Minoa, Mycenae, Petra, Inverness, Whidbey Island, Olvera Street, Piccadilly Circus, Stanley Park, Isleta and San Ildefonso Pueblos, the new Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Mount Nebo, the Knife Chain lakes in Canada, Tall Stacks in Cincinnati, Tall Ships in Halifax, Holden Beach.

My feet walked me into a church in California once and walked me out, 48 years ago, with a beautiful wife. My feet have walked the pediatric floors of three hospitals, carrying newborn infants.

A nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital asked me a few days ago if I have prepared myself for the years ahead. I answered that yes, we have arranged our house so that I can live completely on the first floor. We have a new ramp for wheelchair access, and a contractor will soon install an "accessible" shower. But I did not fully answer her question. I am working on it.

Simple things. Now I do live in my memories. But I take new joys in the little things. The goldfinches eating from our feeders. The squirrels eating the corn we put out. The jelly Judy makes from our Concord grapes. Our St. Francis garden. The friends who walk past our front porch when we sit out there of an evening. I love the smell of the white lilacs beside our bedroom window. I love the friendships I have made through the years, friends in our church, and at the College. I read to Judy every evening before we go to bed. I read novels and biographies and histories. I listen to Mozart and Bach and Willie and Dolly and Barbra and Neil.

Here is a prayer I learned years ago, a famous Navajo prayer which captures the new life I live.

In beauty I walk
with beauty behind me I walk
with beauty above me I walk
with beauty around me I walk
In beauty I walk

Time for bed.

November 9, 2008

Stride Toward Freedom

Shortly after his election, President-elect Barack Obama admitted that he was just a "mutt." Aren't we all? We are a nation of "mutts," and on November 4 we elected one of our own.

The road to this election was not easy, and it was long. Thirty-five years ago I had the privilege of introducing Alex Haley to an audience at West Virginia Wesleyan College. I had read his "Autobiography of Malcolm X," written and completed just days before Malcolm was assassinated in the Audubon Ballroom in New York City. Malcolm sat down night after night in a small New York apartment, telling his life story to Haley. Together they wrote the story, and then a shot brought Malcolm down. Haley wrote the epilogue in the wake of the moment.

But in 1971 Haley brought another story to Wesleyan.

This was the story of Kunta Kinte and Chicken George, of Bess - the Big House Cook - the story of a grandmother in Henning, Tennessee, the story he was later to call "Roots," a story that captivated America when it was serialized on TV. It was the story of one African family brought to these shores, but in reality the story of all African slaves, stolen from home and family, subjected to the cruelty of a slave ship prison, sold on a market in a strange new land. A land destined to make "mutts" of us all.

The first slave ship arrived in Virginia in 1619, bringing 20 Africans to this shore. That was long before Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, in 1865, when we decided slavery was no longer an option, and it would be another century before we passed the Voters' Rights Act and moved forward with our civil rights movement. Many suffered. Historians do not agree on the number of slaves who died aboard those ships, but the number is well into the millions.

I am thinking of a small group of defeated Confederate soldiers gathering for a horseback ride on Christmas Eve, 1865, in Pulaski, Tennessee, wearing costumes and calling themselves the Ku Klux Klan.

Determined, as they were, to keep the "races" pure. Determined, as they were, to prevent what happened on November 4. Determined that we should never become a nation of mulattos, amalgams, octoroons, mutts. They gained national attention, elected Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest to be their Grand Wizard, and began an effective program of intimidation directed at all who challenged the "Southern way of life," meaning white superiority and white control. This first Klan became so violent that Gen. Forrest resigned and the Klan was put to rest by President Grant's Civil Rights' Act of 1871.

The Klan was revived in 1915, particularly following the showing of a new film, D.W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation." This second Klan became a national movement, with a membership of as many as four to five million men. They were violent men. They preached racism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and nativism doctrines.

We will never know how many murders were committed by members of the Klan, but the number is well into the thousands. All in the effort to prevent a "mutt" from gaining the highest office in the land. They failed.

But there was another movement, a gathering of forces opposed to the racism of the Klan. That was a movement initiated by several forces: the public funeral of Emmett Till; the 1954 Supreme Court decision that ended segregation in public schools; the decision made by Rosa Parks not to give up her seat; the election of Martin Luther King to guide the bus boycott in Montgomery; the decision of four college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, to sit at a lunch counter in a Woolworth Store. It was the civil rights movement.

During the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, members of the Klan were convicted in the murder of NAACP leader Medgar Evers, the murder of the four little girls in the Birmingham Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1963, the three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964, and others. All, let us say, in the great effort to prevent what has recently happened in this wonderful nation of ours.

We have elected a great man to be our president, and he is one of us.

He is not white. He laughs and calls himself a "mutt."

And mutt he is. Mutt we all are. We are a nation of many peoples, and we are stronger for it. Our racism is not dead, but we have taken what Martin Luther King called a stride toward freedom.

November 13, 2008

Into These Mountains

My wife, Judy, was born in northern India, grew up there, and graduated from Woodstock High School in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. Her home was Lucknow, where her father was missionary for the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Church. They left their mission charge in 1957, coming back to America after Judy, the third daughter, graduated from high school and returned to the States to begin her college career at Baker University in Kansas (where she found me!).

In that turbulent region, more than three centuries before the birth of Christ, Alexander the Great marched his Macedonian army out of Europe, through Persia and the mountains of modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, bringing Greek "civilization" to those mountain people. Judy's father was a real adventurer and camper, and he took that little Methodist family up into the mountains where they visited villages of blue-eyed, blond-haired boys and girls wearing still the clothing of Alexander's marauding troops. And may I give you a book to read? Try "The Afghan Campaign" by Steven Pressfield (2006).

This is the land of Michener's "Caravans." Here dwell the tribal societies of Pashtun, Durrani, Ghilzai, Kirghiz, Hazari, Uzbek, Turk, Mongol, and smaller groups. Here crosses the Silk Road, Marco Polo's route to China. Through these valleys came Hulagu Khan, grandson of Genghis.

Islam made its way into northern India, again coming from Persia and over the Khyber Pass, in 712 A.D. That brought a never-ending source of conflict. To those Islamic artisans the world owes one of the most beautiful works of architecture, the Taj Mahal.

But also the never-ending conflict between Hindu and Muslim.

Judy's home, Lucknow, was a tinderbox for the famed Mutiny of 1857, the great attempt of Indian sepoys to throw off the British East India Co.'s control of central India. English troops of the Raj, and their families, retreated from hostilities into the British Residency in Lucknow, where they lived under siege for 87 days.

The Residency was a great and historic building just down the street from Judy's home in the Methodist parsonage.

In the years before Partition, Judy's family took a vacation in Kashmir, living on a houseboat in regal style. Now, of course, Kashmir is a divided land, a continuing struggle still between Muslim and Hindu, between Pakistani and Indian troops.

Judy lived in India through the years of Gandhi's struggle for independence, his nonviolent campaign to rid his people of the British Raj, his ashrams, his instruction in ahimsa, his work with Jawaharlal Nehru as India gained her independence only to find the greater struggle with the nascent search by Muslims for their own independence, which resulted in creation of a two-part Pakistan, later divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Judy, attending boarding school in the mountains above the Ganges and the great India plains, listened in terror from her Woodstock school as Muslims and Hindus murdered each other in the town below their classrooms. The children listened to the screams, the gunshots, the broken glass in 1947. Those scenes were vividly portrayed in the great film "Gandhi."

Later, Judy's father worked with Nehru to bring food to the refugees, Muslims, and Hindus who lost their homes in that tragedy. We have a photo of Judy's dad, Dr. Donald F. Ebright, meeting with Nehru to discuss food distribution in the refugee camps.

We loved the two great books by M.M. Kaye: "The Far Pavilions" and "Shadow of the Moon." Both are set in the mid-19th century, and the first was made into one of the very great HBO movies.

I mention the first book particularly because it portrays the establishment of the British Raj in Kabul, Afghanistan - and the Afghans' complete destruction of the Raj, killing every last British man, woman, and child, who had taken for granted their right to rule the people of Afghanistan.

The "white man's burden" was a grisly portrayal in the HBO movie. Judy tells of the big, frightening mountain traders from Kabul, bringing their wares down into the Lucknow bazaar after the spring thaw. So frightening were those "Kabulis" that Indian mothers used to tell misbehaving children to straighten up or the Kabulis would get them!

One of the ironies of the mission to India was the marriage of Judy's best friend to a Muslim Durrani zemindar. The marriage did not last, of course, but was quite a reversal of the intentions of the mission movement. To this day, the two remain the best of friends.

Needless to say, the Soviet Union made one of her greatest mistakes when she tried to establish Soviet rule in Afghanistan in 1978, and was eventually driven out some nine years later, tail between her legs. That invasion only strengthened the hand of the mujahideen, and eventually the Taliban and al-Qaida. And of course, that played a role in the events of September 11, 2001.

I leave you with two last recommendations. Try first Peter Matthiessen's "Snow Leopard." And then a book that I guess more Gazette readers have read than any other in recent years: "Three Cups of Tea" by David Oliver Relin and Greg Mortenson. Set in the chilling mountain villages of Pakistan, it's a story to warm your heart.

Into these mountains, America now finds herself committed, and the end of this story remains very much in doubt.

December 14, 2008

The Conservative Coalition

I have done lots of writing and research on the Conservative Coalition political phenomenon, including my doctoral dissertation, "Religious Affiliation as a Factor in the Voting Behavior of the 89th Congress."

In the years 1966 and 1967, when I was reading and writing about Congress and how the Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, and others were voting up on Capitol Hill, I can assure you that this coalition was a major part of my research. Many of those racist Southern Democrats were leaders in the Methodist and Baptist churches.

The session I studied was the Congress elected in 1964, one year after the Kennedy assassination, a year when Lyndon Johnson brought along on his coattails a very large liberal majority in Congress. Civil Rights was the big issue that, more than anything else, divided Congress. The Southern Democrats, who had been able to block Civil Rights legislation for most of the previous three decades, were stymied this time. Johnson led the march to new freedoms and opportunities for African-Americans. That led eventually to the election of Barack Obama. The Congress I studied was an amazing phenomenon.

The Conservative Coalition emerged in 1937, immediately after FDR massively defeated Alf Landon, and then tried, without success, to load the very reactionary Supreme Court - a court that had blocked many efforts, by the way, to liberalize civil rights in America. Thank goodness President Eisenhower later appointed Earl Warren to lead that Court, and thank goodness for a little girl in my hometown, Linda Carol Brown.

Roosevelt's coattails left the conservative vote with almost nothing to work with. In the Senate of 96 members, only 17 were Republicans. In the House of Representatives, there were only 89 Republicans out of 431 members. Working together, though, the two conservative forces formed the so-called Conservative Coalition.

The coalition brings together, for voting purposes, a group of conservative Southern Democrats with the Republicans in Congress.

Even when Democrats greatly outnumber Republicans, this rump group of Southern conservatives can, by voting with the Republicans, threaten or employ a filibuster to block liberal legislation. These Southern Democrats voted with their own party on foreign affairs, but with the Republicans on many domestic issues.

Working together, the conservative Supreme Court and the coalition in Congress were able to block Roosevelt's and Truman's efforts to bring equality to America. Even a federal lynching law could not pass. Poll taxes, bogus literacy tests, shenanigans to trick black voters - like moving the place of voting on the day of elections - all conspired to keep the African-American vote to its lowest possible number.

That coalition disappeared, by the way, when the Republicans flooded into the South, replacing the Southern Democrats, the "Solid South," with their own kind. As it disappeared, though, the Gingrich revolution assumed power and authority in the mid-1990s, and slowly the Democrats have drifted back into Dixie.

I write this column now to warn that the Conservative Coalition has again raised its ominous head. In a recent vote on the economic stimulus package, 11 Democrats joined forces with their Republican colleagues in the House of Representatives in a failed attempt to block the measure. Of those 11, eight were from the South or from border or nearby states.

A pattern is emerging. Get it?

February 27, 2009

Filibuster

President Obama brought along with him a nearly filibuster-proof Congress. Which is to say, the Democrats can (almost) have their own way. But not quite. Across the aisle, the Republicans are very nearly able to block whatever legislation they want to block with the use of that favorite Senate tactic, the filibuster. But not quite.

With 56 (57 minus the ailing Ted Kennedy) Democrats plus two independents who generally vote with Democrats, they can very nearly control the vote. But not quite.

The final version of the \$787 billion economic stimulus package passed, late on Friday, February 13, with a vote of 60 to 38. Plenty to pass the bill, just enough to block a filibuster. But they needed three Republican votes to provide the needed 60 percent. They had one more if they needed it. Kennedy could have stayed, but by Friday evening it was clear his vote was not needed and he left early to continue treatment for brain cancer.

Of course these issues are similar, though opposite, to a Senate override of a presidential veto. In this case the majority party in the Senate is able to trample down the veto attempted by the president.

Voters become frustrated by these strange creatures of democracy, the filibuster, the veto override, and cloture. But for good reason, the Senate has preserved these otherwise seemingly Neanderthal forms of legislative procedure.

Today a cloture vote requires a three-fifths majority voting to effect a cloture. So Democrats can (almost) seal up liberal legislation whenever all members of that party - plus independents Lieberman and Sanders - join in a vote to call an end to debate. Plus one Republican.

The "filibuster" had its origin in Spanish and French parliamentary procedure, and came to the United States shortly after we organized our own form of democracy.

When an attempt was made, in 1806, to close debate in the U.S. Senate, Aaron Burr successfully argued that the call "move the previous question" was not appropriate in the U.S. Senate.

A filibuster did not emerge until 1841, when Henry Clay tried, with a simple majority vote, to shut down debate on a banking bill, and the great Missouri Sen. Thomas Hart Benton (early "rival" of Lincoln and later a member of his Cabinet), accused Clay of stifling the Senate's right to debate. Benton won that debate and a simple majority was from that time on no longer enough to stifle debate.

How do you "cloture" and strangle a filibuster? That became a major issue of Senate rules through the 20th century. From 1917 until 1949 the Senate required a two-thirds majority of those voting to cloture debate, and in 1949 the Senate decided (a Southern stratagem) that cloture would require a two-thirds majority vote of the entire Senate. In other words, a senator would not even have to be present to support a filibuster. His or her membership in that august body was alone enough to support the filibuster by not voting. (With today's 100 members of the Senate, that would have required a vote of 67 to block the filibuster. Even if most of the remaining 33 senators did not show up.)

Today the Senate requires 60 percent of those voting to cloture a filibuster. And the filibuster has become a most common tool.

Since the beginning of the 21st century a filibuster-cloture vote has been used more than 50 times each session.

The filibuster became a major weapon among the Southern senators during the civil-rights era. Through this tool the Dixiecrats were able to prevent legislation intended to put an end to the old Jim Crow control of the South. Democratic (later Republican) Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina set a filibuster record in 1957 when he spoke for 24 hours, 18 minutes in an effort to prevent a civil-rights bill from becoming law. In the long run, however, Thurmond was unsuccessful, and the bill ultimately passed. In another failed effort, Southern senators launched a 75-hour filibuster to block the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

And of course the various attempts to cloture debate and prevent civil-rights legislation in the 1960s were unsuccessful, leading to a new rule of law and ultimately to civil-rights and voting-rights bills in America. And ultimately to the election of our new president.

Thus in these early days of the new Congress, elected last November, the Democrats had far more votes than needed to pass the economic stimulus package. But they had to find at least 60 votes in the Senate to prevent a filibuster. And that was a close call. Support came from Maine Republican Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe, and from Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Arlen Specter. And since these three Republicans hold the cards, they can call the shots.

Politics!

March 15, 2009

The Political Cartoon

A few days ago, Gazette columnist Robert Rupp mentioned that he would like to compare the cartoons directed against Franklin Roosevelt with the attacks now leveled at President Obama. That's amazing. I have them. I have about 100 cartoons cut from the Chicago Tribune between 1933 and 1946. How? There's a story here.

As I finished my dissertation at Boston University in 1967, I signed a contract with a Presbyterian college in Kansas, the College of Emporia. That was nice, because after a decade in New England, I needed to get back closer to home, closer to Mom and Dad. I actually taught a semester at Quinnipiac College in Connecticut, from January through summer school, before packing up and taking the small family to Kansas.

Emporia was the home of William Allen White, editor of another newspaper called the Gazette, famed Pulitzer winner for his penetrating columns. In junior high, I read two of his essays as school assignments, one titled "What's the Matter with Kansas?" The other was the obituary he wrote for his teenage daughter Mary, who was killed when her head hit a low tree branch while riding her horse.

The College of Emporia was a weak school. Second only to volume of students from Kansas were the students from New Jersey, looking for a place which would take them in spite of low scores. In a faculty of about 80, I was one of the only three Ph.D. professors.

The administration was pretty reactionary, and quickly I learned that they were not very happy with me. Well, the feeling was mutual.

Students with left-of-center political leanings were attracted to me, and I to them. Those were the years of student radicalism, burning or pouring blood on student records, challenging university administrations to turn ROTC programs off-campus, opposition to the Vietnam War, new support for the civil rights movement, assassinations, and the upcoming 1968 election. Dynamic times.

The students wanted a weekend picnic as spring approached. They called it a "love-in," mostly, I think, to hector the uptight administration. They held the picnic in Peter Pan Park, White's gift to the city. Of course, they invited Judy and me. They also invited three other professors. Unfortunately or otherwise, we could not go. Judy and I had committed to go up to Nebraska City to help Eugene McCarthy with a door-to-door campaign. Clean with Gene. So we missed the love-in.

In Nebraska City we were assigned to stay overnight with a retired Methodist minister and his wife. We had much in common with them. His ministry had been divided between Illinois and Nebraska. When he learned that I was a Methodist minister and a sociology professor, he brought out two scrapbooks that he wanted to pass on to me. While in Illinois he had cut out the anti-Roosevelt cartoons published by the Chicago Tribune. Most were black-and-white, but a few were in color. He correctly thought that perhaps some day I could use them in the classroom. I used them in the sociology section called political propaganda.

Here they were. Nearly 100 cartoons attacking FDR. I cut them all out from the scrapbook and pasted them onto colored construction paper. I made overhead projections out of them and put them in a library box. I kept them on my shelf. And here they are for Dr. Rupp, and I hereby bequeath them to Rupp to see if he can use them in the classroom. Or in a Gazette column.

One cartoon is by a fellow named Parrish. FDR's got his arm around Old Joe Stalin, planning the next war stratagem with de Gaulle caught between. Here is someone named Orr decrying the "New Deal War." Here we've got Roosevelt reading "Das Kapital." These are classics.

That is not the end of the story. It was pretty opportune that Judy and I spent the weekend in Nebraska. The students at Peter Pan Park smoked marijuana at the picnic, and they did it defiantly. The college got wind of the love-in, and sent the dean of students with a college photographer to record the event.

The students gathered for a group photo in defiant fashion, some of them smoking "grass" with the cigs held up in the air for the photo. It didn't help that the three professors joined the students for the photo.

I seriously doubt that any of the three profs took a puff of the illegal substance. But I do know that those three friends of mine were not invited to teach at the college the next year. Not to mention that the students in the photo were sent packing, too. It was thus a close call for me. Two years later I signed a contract with West Virginia Wesleyan College, and life for us has been "almost heaven" ever since. No more love-ins.

But I had better record it here that I have never touched a marijuana cigarette, period.

June 17, 2009

Night on Bald Mountain

In 1993, Professor Tom Cline and I led a January term course to Bulgaria. We had a dozen Wesleyan students with us. I have told that story elsewhere, but here I will lift out one piece of the story. Music lovers will observe that I took the title of this essay from Mussorgsky's music by the same name. Couldn't resist.

This was a cold January. The night we arrived the temperature at the airport was minus 3 degrees Fahrenheit. My hostess was a young woman named Christina Christova. She planted me in her parents' home for the three weeks. They lived in one of those communist-era apartment buildings. Drab and cold. I slept in my clothes every night with my coat on top of the blankets.

We traveled everywhere throughout Bulgaria. The communist government had just collapsed, and there was a wonderful feeling of new beginnings. One day we visited a monastery. Another day we all went skiing. Just for a day. Down on the south side of Bulgaria. I remember them showing signs of a city south of the ski slope. Thessaloniki, Macedonia, someone said.

The ski slope was pretty bare, bald. They had no snow machines, and it had not snowed much. Lots of rocks in the snow. Nor am I much of a skier. By afternoon I was tired of struggling with the bald mountain, and I walked around just looking here and there for something to do.

I found a ski lift, operating, a few hundred yards from where most of us were trying to ski. There was no one on the lift, and no one controlling the lift at the top. But it was running, and I hopped on. It was quite primitive, but looked OK.

About halfway down the mountain the ski lift came to a halt. The motor turned off. After a few minutes up there in the gondola, I realized this might be a problem. Nobody knew I was stranded in my little chair. Nor could I see any living person from where I sat. I called "help" a few times, but I am certain no one could hear me.

It was late in the afternoon, probably after 4 p.m. I began to think the workers there, down at the bottom, believed the ski lift was empty, and perhaps had gone home for the night.

I looked about me and could see three possibilities.

I could remain in my little chair all night. I was certain I would literally freeze to death that way. Or I could jump. That would be about a 100-foot fall. That would kill me. Or perhaps I could shinny up the apparatus, climb about thirty feet along the main cable, and shinny down the huge tower. Of course I was not strong enough to do that, and even if I did, the machine might start up again and mangle me when it carried me past the next tower. It was late enough in the day, and Tom and my students would not mount our bus, nor would they possibly know that I was missing until after the sun went down. They would never find me up in the sky.

Here's a hint. I didn't die.

After half an hour, the machine started again, and I made it to the bottom station. I think someone showed up and wanted a ride. Praise the Lord. But the event frightened me terribly, and continues to haunt me to this day. That was my "evening" on Bald Mountain.

June 19, 2009

University of Cambridge

England's University of Cambridge is celebrating its eighth centennial. Founded in 1209 A.D., it is one of the oldest universities in the world. And for the school year 1977-78, that was my university. I was a visiting scholar at that great university, and it was a marvelous academic year. It happened this way.

We hired a young sociology scholar, Dr. Tom Boyd, to teach in our department for the school year 1976-77. He was a native of Kentucky, and had a fresh Ph.D. from Cambridge University. Tom knew that I had a sabbatical coming up, and asked if I didn't want to apply for a position as a visiting scholar at Cambridge. Of course that sounded wonderful, even though I doubted my chances were very good. Anyway, Tom told me how to apply, gave me the address of the Visiting Scholar Society at the university, and told me to end the letter with the words, "thank you very much, indeed," which I did. Lo and behold, I soon received a letter admitting me to their program. The appointment was to last the full school year, 1977-78, and I was to have full free access to all lectures at the university, and library privileges.

Yes, but I had a family. A wife and three little kids. What to do? The Visiting Scholars Society assured me that they would find a "flat" for us near the university, and schools for three children. The rent for the flat was to be about the same as our mortgage payments in Buckhannon. We found three Wesleyan students who would rent our Buckhannon house, making mortgage payments to the Adrian Buckhannon Bank. We worked with Europe-by-Car and Volkswagen of America, and arranged to pick up a new red and white VW bus upon arrival in Europe.

We bought five tickets for a flight on Icelandic Airlines. We took a flight arranged through the American Association of University Professors. And on a July evening, we boarded our flight at the Kennedy Airport in New York. A stopover in Reykjavik, Iceland, at 4 a.m., and we were soon landing in Luxemburg. Our Volkswagen bus awaited us near the airport, and soon we were driving west toward our destination.

A ferry boat. A room at the White Cliffs Hotel. A breakfast of "kippers and prunes," and soon we found our way through London and on north to our university home. Driving all the way on the left side of the streets and highways. Number 7, St. Mark's Court. Just off Barton Road.

I was invited to join Darwin College. I found time for 17 hours of classes that first term. Mostly social theory and criminology. I wanted to know what was happening in those two disciplines now a decade after I had finished my doctorate at Boston University. We found time for weekend trips: London, Scotland, the Lake Country, the home of Beatrix Potter, Wales, the Roman Baths at Bath, Stonehenge. We looked for the monster at Loch Ness, heard the canons go boom at Edinburgh Castle, toured the castles and palaces of that ancient land. And took an exotic camping trip to Athens, Greece, before the year was over. We stood on the Acropolis, stood where St. Paul gave his famous sermon on the "unknown God," walked the streets where Socrates trod, and the streets where the Stoics plied their trade. En route we stopped in Paris, Versailles, Venice (a ride in a gondola), Dubrovnik, Croatia, and Macedonia. We heard the choir at King's College, worshipped at Ely Cathedral on Christmas Eve, and stood where Becket met his destiny in the Canterbury Cathedral.

We sent the children off to school in September. Peter and Stephen taking a red double-decker bus to the Comberton Village College, while Judy daily walked Jennifer to the Newnham-Croft school near our flat. Judy stopping on her way home for a loaf of bread at the local baker shop.

Cambridge University was founded 800 years ago at a bridge across the Cam River, a bridge for cattle to cross. The university was founded by scholars from Oxford University after a town-gown dispute - over a murder and a hanging. This makes the university one of the oldest in the Western world, and it ranks among the top five in the world. Cambridge claims the distinction of producing and supporting such scholars as Sir Isaac Newton and Sir Charles Darwin. Eighty-three Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Cambridge scholars as of 2008, more than any other university in the world.

Daily, as I walked to class, I passed the window out of which Sir Isaac Newton is said to have seen an apple fall, giving him the insight to proclaim the Law of Gravity. Today in the garden beside that window a young apple tree grows, presumably the grandchild of the original tree. Stephen Hawking now lectures at Cambridge on black holes in the universe. He plans to retire this year.

We watched young people punting on the Cam. We marveled at the aconites pushing their noses up through the early spring snows. We laughed as we watched the boat races on the Cam River between Jesus College and Mary Magdalene College. I wanted to see the short-skirted cheerleaders rooting for Jesus, but to no avail. Of an evening, we often walked along the Cam to the Green Man pub in neighboring Grantchester, keeping pace with a dozen swans paddling home after a busy day in town.

Congratulations on eight centuries, Cambridge University.

August 7, 2009

Dr. John Warner Jr., Ph.D,
was Professor of Sociology
at West Virginia Wesleyan College,
Buckhannon, West Virginia

For over twenty-five years
he was also a contributing columnist
to the Charleston Gazette newspaper
in Charleston, West Virginia

A Notice appeared in the Charleston Gazette, December 1, 2009

Dr. John R. Warner Jr. - a semi-retired West Virginia Wesleyan College professor known to thousands of readers from his Gazette columns - died Monday in a Buckhannon nursing home. He was an ordained United Methodist elder who constantly espoused the church's "social gospel" of caring for underdogs, along with liberal Democratic Party principles. He opposed the former Bush White House in numerous contributor columns. A sociologist, Dr. Warner was a history scholar who often outlined centuries-old backgrounds behind various current conflicts.

About the Editor

In the fall of 1973, Gary McGrew arrived on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College as John was beginning his fourth fall of teaching at the school. In his senior year, Gary took a one-semester class in sociology from John, who impressed Gary as an able and politically perceptive educator with a dry wit. Gary would complete his studies, in English as a major and Religion as a minor, and graduate with honors in 1977. He went on to serve as a Presbyterian (PCUSA) parish pastor for over 40 years.

Gary met Paula Lowther (Class of 1978) at Wesleyan and they married in 1977. In 2001 Paula returned to Wesleyan, becoming a tenured Associate Professor and Director of the Library. In retirement Paula was named Wesleyan College Historian. Sadly student Paula never had a class from John, but adult Paula was John's colleague at Wesleyan from 2001 until his death in 2009. During that time Paula and John had many extended conversations and she remembers his strong views. Paula's research contributed to this book.

Their skilled children, Stephen (Class of 2004) and Amy (Class of 2009), are fourth generation alumni of West Virginia Wesleyan College. Stephen had a sociology class from John; and Stephen recalls: "John was fascinating, a storyteller; and I did not really appreciate the depth of what he was saying until much later. In class he told many stories of the 1960s and the civil-rights era in the South. He was passionate and definitely worried about the dark side of humanity." Amy knew John and Judy by reputation only.

Today Gary and Paula live a ten-minute walk from Wesleyan in Buckhannon, West Virginia, and nearby their daughter and her family. They live a brisk three-minute walk from the United Methodist Church where John and Judy attended and actively participated. Because Buckhannon is a small town and Wesleyan is a small college, Gary and Paula know or recognize many of the folk in John's stories.

